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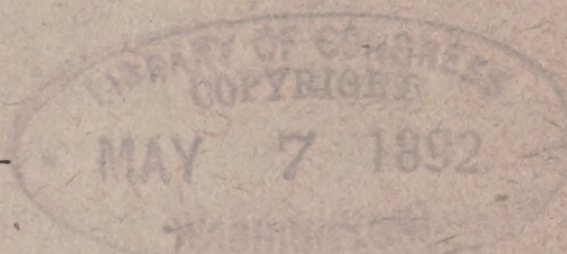
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ALARIC.

CHAPTER I.

ALARIC.

NOT far from the city of Syracuse—not the Syracuse of to-day, shattered, and narrowed down to a place of little note—but the Syracuse of an older day—a day long passed—when it was the metropolis of all Sicily, an object of longing to ambitious conquerors, and one of the finest cities in the world ; not far from this place, upon the shore of the sea, stood a man who had just landed from a vessel that was now sailing away towards the North. He was quite young—not over five-and-twenty—tall and well proportioned ; with a muscular system finely developed ; and possessing a face not only striking in its manly beauty, but remarkable in one so young for its stern, resolute and self-reliant expression. His dress was light and simple, and evidently of Greek manufacture ; the lower limbs being clothed in close-fitting goat-skin, above which he wore a shirt of white linen, confined at the waist by a belt of fine mail.

Upon his head was a cap of woven stuff, the top drooping over the right ear ; and his feet were shielded by a pair of sandals. His only weapon was a short, heavy sword, which hung, in a leathern scabbard, from his belt of mail. He stood for awhile, gazing about, as though undecided what course he should pursue ; but finally he espied an old fisherman, not far off, who had just come down upon the beach, and towards him he made his way.

“A bright, pleasant morning, good sir,” said the youth.

The old man cast his net from his shoulders and gazed up. He carefully scanned the features before him, and then replied :

“Aye, fair sir, it is a pleasant morning. We have many such on this coast.”

“And yet it storms sometimes, I suppose,” suggested the first speaker.

“He is a wise man who little heeds the storms he cannot quell,” said the fisherman, with a nod of the head, which seemed to give his words more meaning than the circumstances under which they were spoken would imply.

“You are right there,” responded the other. “But tell me—where can I find Artabanus, the hermit?”

The fisherman took another careful look into his interlocutor’s face, and then answered :

“He lives upon yonder mountain, which is called Catalona. Do you wish to see him?”

“Yes.”

“Then follow the path that leads to yonder cot, until it brings you to a small stream. Cross that, and then upon your right hand you will see a beaten track. He lives in a cave near the top of the mountain, and this track will lead you directly thither.”

The young man thanked his informant, and was upon the point of turning away, when the latter resumed :

“ You are a stranger here ?”

“ I am.”

“ But not always so.”

“ How mean you ?”

“ You have been in Syracuse before ?”

“ I said I was a stranger here,” the youth replied, with a slight show of displeasure ; for the fisherman was still regarding him sharply.

“ Pardon,” cried the old man. “ I mean no offense. Your face looks familiar. It has the cast of a countenance I fancied I had seen before.”

“ There may be many faces in Sicily like mine, good sir,” returned the new-comer, with a light smile.

“ There may be, but I have not seen them.”

“ How now, old man ? Why—thou didst but just say thou hadst surely seen one like it.”

“ Aye, but that was years ago,” rejoined the fisherman, with a shake of the head. “ I do not think I have seen such an one of late.”

“ You’ll at least remember of having seen such an one on this morning,” said the young man, and as he thus spoke he turned away.

“ Aye,” muttered the old Sicilian, half to himself, but yet loud enough to reach other ears, “ and I call on Neptune to witness that I have seen it before. Such faces are not multiplied—they are not plenty in Syracuse these times. Alas ! more’s the pity.”

The youth hesitated for a moment, as though he would turn back, but he overcame the disposition, and kept on. When he had begun to ascend the mountain, he stopped and looked behind him, and saw that the fisherman was already upon the water.

“ Can it be,” he said to himself, “ that my face is so

little changed? I think I remember that old man, for he has spread his nets long in these waters; but how should he remember me? I pray the gods that there will be not many in Syracuse that will yet be so observant."

With this the traveler kept on up the mountain until he had reached a broad table of rock, from whence he could see the bay and the city beyond. The great metropolis was spread out before him, with its massive walls, its temples, and its palaces, and a tear started down his cheek as he gazed upon the scene. He clasped his hands upon his bosom, and, with a few muttered words, he started on again. He crossed the stream, and took the path to which he had been directed; but he did not follow it as one who was a stranger to its windings. He pursued his way with an ease and assurance, and, at times, with an abstractedness which could have been indulged in only by one who knew well the way he was going. Up the steep, rocky height he climbed, and, when he finally stopped, it was before the entrance to a cave—a cave which nature had fashioned in the mountain's side, and sheltered from the sun's fervid heat, and the fury of the storm.

At the mouth of this cavern sat an old man over whose head some fourscore years had rolled. His hair and beard were white as the fleecy cloud that sailed above the mount, and floated in silken, wavy masses over his shoulders and breast. A mantle of gray cloth enveloped his frame, and his feet were shod with heavy sandals. He was engaged over an old manuscript, but as he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, he closed the volume and raised his head.

"Good-morning, my son," he said, with a look of simple welcome.

“Kind father, I greet thee,” the youth returned, at the same time extending his hand.

“How !” cried the aged man, starting to his feet, as the accents fell upon his ear. He shaded his eyes with the palm of the left hand, and gazed eagerly into his visitor’s face. “Do I see aright ?” he added. “Is it Alaric—my old pupil ?”

“Aye, good Artabanus, I am Alaric—come once more to see thee.”

For some time the hermit gazed into the young man’s face in silence, but finally he said :

“Sit down—sit down, my son. Thy presence has started a host of varied emotions to life within me, and I must recover my thoughts ere I can talk with thee in reason.”

“Thank the gods, I find thee alive and in health,” replied the youth, as he let go the old man’s hand, and took a seat upon a wooden bench close by.

“Aye—I am well in body,” returned Artabanus. “But,” he added, thoughtfully, continuing to gaze earnestly into his companion’s face as he spoke, “the body is but a small part of man, and the ills of the flesh are very joys when compared with some of the pains to which the soul may be subject. But tell me of thyself. Where hast thou been ?”

“I have been in Greece,” replied the youth. “When I fled from these shores, eight years ago, I sought refuge there, and there I have remained ever since. O ! I wept this morning as I gazed down upon the city of my birth. I had thought I had done weeping over those memories ; but when I again gazed upon Syracuse they came crowding upon me with a power which I could not resist. I saw the very temple beneath the walls of which my father and my brother were slain ; and I could see the roof beneath which my mother

died. Artabanus, there were not many of the patrician families escaped that foul butchery."

"No, Alaric. Of all who were loyal to the true interests of the people, I have seen only yourself return. There were a few escaped, but not many. Were there any went with you to Greece?"

"No, father. I escaped alone. I saw my noble parent cut down—I saw my brother fall—and when I knew I had not a relative left in the city, I fled. Fortune favored me. I found a small boat by the seashore, and I put out alone upon the dark waters. I floated away to Melita, and from thence I gained a passage to Greece. The tyrant still reigns in Syracuse?"

"Alas! yes. And his deeds are evil, and the people suffer. We have had no place in Sicily since good Helixus died; thou wert but a mere child then."

"I was seven years old. I remember the good king well, for my father, you know, was one of his chief officers."

"Aye, you were older than I thought," said the hermit, musingly.

"And I remember that there was some mystery connected with the good king's death," remarked Alaric. "Am I not right?"

"There was not much mystery," answered the old man. "He was weak and weary, and he left the throne that he might die in peace; and death soon came to him. But why hast thou returned to Syracuse?"

"Can you not guess?" returned the youth.

"I might guess many things, my son."

"And yet but one of them would be right. I have said that I left no relative behind me when I made my escape from this place; but I did leave one whom I loved—one about whom my affections were entwined

with a life that could not die. You know of whom I speak?"

"Aye, you speak of the mason's daughter, Ianthé."

"Yes, father. Is she alive?"

"She is."

"And well?"

"She is well."

"And," pursued the youth, in a more eager tone, "is she still free?"

"Why? Have you thought that she would remember you in love through the years that have passed?"

"O, do not say that she has not!"

"I have not said so, my son. But you should remember that she was only twelve years old when you went away."

"Yet she possessed a woman's mind. She had learned of you, my master. O! do not tell me that she has ceased to love me. True, she was a child in years, but I loved her then, and my love has grown stronger in the separation which has followed. I know there is danger to me here, but I came with a will to meet it."

"There may be more danger than you think of," said the hermit, watching the countenance of his young friend narrowly as he spoke.

"I care not for the danger. Tell me of Ianthé."

"But suppose your very life were in danger if you thought of the maiden?"

"You may warn me of danger if you will, but do not seek to place the barrier of fear between me and my desire, for I know not the emotion. You, Artabanus, taught me when I was a boy, and your wise lessons have not departed from my mind. You taught me that there were many things more to be feared than death, and I have come, prepared rather to die than live all

alone in a distant land, with the sad memories of my unhappy country for my only heritage."

"And you would not turn from death, should it raise its threatening front between yourself and Ianthe?" The old man's gaze grew more earnest as he thus spoke, and a spark, within which seemed to gleam some newly awakened hope, burned in his eye.

"My father," answered Alaric, with a flushing cheek, "I could almost feel offended did I think you doubted me, but I do not think so. Show me that Ianthe loves me, and not even Pyrrho himself, with the blood-stained crown of Sicily upon his brow, shall have power to startle me from my course while life is mine."

Artabanus started to his feet, and grasped the youth by the hand.

"Noble Alaric," he cried, with a joyful enthusiasm, "thou art worthy of the maiden's hand. She does love thee—she cherishes thy memory within her heart as the most precious thing of earth, and for long years she has lived upon the hope that thou wouldst return to her."

"O, the gods be praised!" ejaculated the young man.

"But," added the hermit, in a changed voice, "there must be danger in thy path. Pyrrho holds his throne only through the fear and enslavement of the people, and he knows it. Your father was one of his bitterest enemies, and he was also one of the first whom the usurper found it necessary to put out of the way. You are not only the very image of your noble parent, but you must remember that you had arrived almost at the full stature of manhood when you fled from Syracuse. You were then seventeen, and from seventeen to five-and-twenty, especially in one so early developed as you were, there is not much change. You were a man

then, and you are no more now. So you must expect that you will be known and recognized."

"Aye—the old fisherman, whose cot is at the foot of the mount, recognized me as one whom he had before seen."

"You mean Glycon?"

"Ah, I remember his name now, though I had forgotten it. Yes, he was sure he had seen me before."

"And remember that he had only seen you occasionally, as you were wont to pass to and from my cave; but there are those within the city who will be sure to recognize you, and should the king, or any of his tools, know of your presence, your destruction would be planned at once."

"And can I be of so much importance as that?" asked Alaric, incredulously.

"Ah," replied the old man with a shake of the head, "when a tyrant begins to fear his people, it requires but little to magnify his danger. You are the only survivor of the old patrician stock that remains true to Sicily—you are the only living male representative of that noble class who stood around the throne of Helixus. Let Pyrrho but dream that thou art in Syracuse, and he would not sleep till he had thee in his power. Dost begin to see thy danger now?"

"Yes, good father, I do. But I fear it not."

"Be wise as well as brave, Alaric," said the old man, with an admonitory motion of the finger. "The truly brave man is not reckless. He shuns danger when he can do so with honor. Remember that thou would not be the sole sufferer should mortal evil befall thee. She whom thou lovest would suffer, too."

"I will remember, father," spoke the youth, with much feeling. "I will shun the danger as much as

possible. But I shall find no home in Sicily, after all, if my life cannot be my own."

"Let us speak of that hereafter," replied Artabanus. "First, do you see Ianthé, and when you have found all right in that quarter, we will consider further."

"I shall find her with her father?"

"Yes, and his house is just where it was eight years ago."

"I will go and seek her then, and—"

"Hold, my son. You had better wait till nightfall ere you enter the city, and also exchange that Greek shirt for a garment less likely to attract attention, for I assure you that too much care cannot be taken."

Alaric was impatient to see Ianthé, but he saw the force of the hermit's reasoning, and he was willing to wait. So he sat down by his old teacher's side again—sat as he had sat years before, when receiving instruction from the same lips—and listened to the story of the wrongs that had been done in Sicily during the last eight years. Hour after hour passed away, and yet Artabanus had still more to tell of the tyrant's cruelty.

"Merciful heavens!" cried the youth, fired almost to frenzy by the recital, "how have the people borne all this?"

"They have borne it under fear of their lives. Pyrrho's soldiers are posted at every place where a murmur can arise."

"And how long shall it last?"

"Till some spirit, with a heart big enough to love Sicily more than life, and a soul that fears not the tyrant, shall arise in Syracuse!" pronounced the old man solemnly.

Alaric started as he met the glance of his aged companion, for there was a meaning in it of more than

moral import. He dared not trust himself to speak then, for the feelings that had sprung to life in his own soul were so wild and strange that they fairly startled him. He arose and walked out upon the mountain, and ever and anon, as his eye rested upon the distant city, the tumult in his soul came to startle him again. He did not seek to analyze the emotion, for it was so bold and gigantic, so genie-like in its misty proportions, that he dared not handle it with reason.

After a while Artabanus came out and touched him upon the shoulder.

“Alaric,” spoke the old man, “it is waxing late, and we may be on the move. Let us eat a crust of bread, and then we will descend the mountain together. I must go with you as far as the fisherman’s cot, for there we must find a more fitting garb for you. Glycon is my friend, and may be trusted to the verge of the grave.”

The frugal supper was soon despatched, and then the two descended the mountain together. At the fisherman’s cot they stopped and found that Glycon had just returned from his day’s labor. Artabanus took him apart, and having explained to him as much of Alaric’s story as he deemed advisable, he asked for some garments that would answer for the youth to wear.

“I knew I had seen the young man before,” cried the fisherman; “and when he had gone this morning, I could have sworn that he used to be one of your pupils. I remember very well how he used to pass here when—

“Never mind now,” interrupted the hermit, impatiently. “We are in a hurry. At some other time we will talk it all over.”

Thus admonished, the fisherman led the way to his scanty wardrobe, and the necessary garments were soon selected. Alaric’s leggins of goat-skin were replaced

by long hose of blue cloth, and his white linen shirt was exchanged for a dark-brown frock, beneath which he could easily conceal his short sword. After this the hermit accompanied him to the southern shore of the bay, and there stopped.

"We had better not be seen together beyond this point," said the old man. "From here the way is plain, and you have had caution enough. At the gate you will not be stopped unless some of the guard should take the whim to question you. Be wise, now, and cautious, and let me see you to-morrow."

"I will not forget."

"Then may the gods guide and protect you!"

With this Artabanus turned back towards the mountain, and Alaric kept on. The shades of night were gathering over the city as the youth passed in at the broad gateway, and the guard had already lighted their torches. He had gone a few steps when a rough voice commanded him to stop.

"Didn't you promise me a fish for my dinner, thou lying knave?" the voice continued.

"You have mistaken your man," said Alaric, hiding his face as much as possible without seeming desirous so to do.

"Good Bacchus, so I have. Thou't not Mestor."

"No," returned our hero, and as he spoke he kept on.

"That's a strange face," said one of the soldiers.

"And I thought, a fair one," added another.

"How now?" asked a third. "Has a stranger passed?"

"Yes, a fisherman."

"'Tis said that a Greek vessel was upon the coast this morning, and we should know whom she landed."

Alaric heard no more. He turned the first angle in the street that presented itself, and then hurried on.

The way was familiar, and he had no difficulty in selecting the various avenues he needed to follow, but he was not wholly easy.

He had reason to believe that he was followed. He took several winding passages for the purpose of avoiding pursuers, but he could not get rid of the echoing foot-fall that sounded upon the pavement behind him. It slackened when he slackened; it stopped when he stopped; and when he hurried on, the echo hurried after him.

CHAPTER II.

IANTHE.—AN ALARM.

Within a comfortably furnished apartment of an humble abode near the western wall of the city, sat two individuals. The first was a man some fifty years of age, stout and muscular in frame and wearing the garb of an artisan, with the dust of toil still clinging to him. He possessed an open, kindly countenance, and if it lacked in comeliness, it certainly made up in honesty and frankness. Such was Bellerus, one of the most skillful masons in Syracuse, and possessing a fair knowledge of architecture in its higher and more elaborate branches. A genial, comfortable disposition had led him into society of his own choice, and an antipathy to turmoil and strife, and an unwillingness to assume much responsibility, had kept him from rising to any eminence in his profession. There may have been another cause for his retaining his humble position, though every desire of his social life seemed to be answered where he was.

The other person—the mason's companion—was a female. She had seen just twenty summers, and was as beautiful as the poet's dream. In form she was light and graceful, her limbs full and round, and her whole frame full of life and vigor. Her features were of true Grecian mould, with large, dark eyes, over which drooped long lashes of silken texture, while a mass of wavy tresses clustered about her superbly rounded shoulders. Beyond the few honest friends who sometimes partook of the artisan's hospitality, she was not known. Bellerus had guarded her with a miser's care, and few there were in the great metropolis who knew of the treasure of beauty that dwelt within its walls. The humble craftsmen who shared her father's confidence loved her devotedly, but they loved with a worshipping love, as the kneeling shepherd loved his goddess; and they were all pledged not to speak of her in their intercourse with the outside world.

“Don't call me foolish, father,” said the maiden, imploringly.

“I do not call thee so, Ianthe,” the mason returned. “I only wish to help you over what may prove a most bitter disappointment. How can you hope that Alaric will ever return?”

“My love tells me so.”

“Ah, but love is blind.”

“Then its feelings are the more to be relied upon, for they come from the internal promptings of the soul. But I feel sure that he will come back to me.”

“I hope he may, my sweet child, and if he could know how beautiful you are, I am sure he would. But, remember, you were only twelve years of age when he went away.”

“And if I have remained true to the love of that

early time, how much more should he have done so, who possessed the soul of manhood within which to enshrine his pledge?"

"Aye, Ianthe, I know you have the strong reason of love on your side, but there are other things to be considered. Think of the danger he might encounter by coming here."

"I tell thee, Alaric fears no danger," cried the beautiful girl, with enthusiasm. "His soul is a stranger to such an emotion."

"And yet he fled from it when his kindred were slain."

"But not alone through fear of death," quickly replied Ianthe. "He fled from a sense of duty. There was no reason why he should remain, but every reason why he should flee. You do wrong, father, when you call his courage in question."

"Pardon, sweet child! I meant no such thing. What! I call in question the bravery of Alaric? Shall I cast a doubt upon the true courage of the son of the noble Orneus? The gods forbid! I know his soul well."

"I did not think you meant it, father, but answer me this one thing: Is there in Syracuse a man whom you would have me marry, should Alaric never return?"

"My eye has not rested upon such an one, Ianthe. I speak not from such a motive. When I bid thee cherish less hopes of Alaric, I do so because I fear he may never find thee."

"Then be at ease, good father. Only last night the bright goddess Electra appeared to me in a dream, and told me that Alaric should return. At least I will hope yet a while longer, for it is sweet to hope."

Bellerus could not find it in his heart to do more towards dispelling the bright promise which the maiden

cherished, and he turned the conversation upon another topic. Only a few words had been spoken, however, when a loud rap was heard without, and the host lighted a torch and went to the door. When he returned, he made a motion for Ianthe to leave the room.

“It is a stranger,” he said, “and it is not meet that thou shouldst be present.”

But the maiden neither spoke nor moved. She had heard the tones of the visitor’s voice, and her quick ear had caught a familiar sound. Bellerus would have reminded her again, but the stranger was close behind him, and quickly entered the apartment. Ianthe saw not the humble fisher’s garb—she only saw the well remembered features which she had carried within the sacred repository of her affections for so long a time. They were changed a little—they had assumed more of manhood—but not changed to love.

“Sweet Electra, my dream is true!” she cried, as she started forward and put forth her hands. “Alaric has come!”

“So heaven looks down with richest blessing!” the young man responded, as he folded the maiden to his bosom.

“May the gods preserve me!” exclaimed the old mason, gazing upon the youthful pair in wonder. “I hope this is no trick of Thaumas to blind me. Alaric, is it thou?”

“In truth, good Bellerus, it is,” returned our hero, extending his hand as he spoke. “Surely thou shouldst know me.”

“Aye, and I do know thee now,” the host responded, grasping the youth warmly, and gazing eagerly into his face. “By the crown of Pluto, I could not mistake that face. Thou art grown wondrously like thy noble father.”

“Then I hope I may emulate his virtues.”

“I hope you may! I hope you may—and I think you will. But is it thou? I ’faith, I can hardly believe my own eyes. I know that face can be none save Alaric’s, but should my eyes play me false?”

“They do not play thee false, my father,” said Ianthe, winding one arm about the youth’s neck, and reclining her head upon his bosom, “for my heart yearned towards him at the first whisper of his voice.”

“Aye,” responded Alaric, folding the beautiful maiden once more to his bosom, “love like ours need not fear deception.”

“I am satisfied,” replied Bellerus; “and it gives my old heart new life to find so glorious a satisfaction so easily.”

The trio were soon seated, and when they had regained somewhat of their composure, Alaric gave a brief account of his adventures during his absence from Sicily. Ianthe sat all the while with her head upon his bosom, ever and anon lifting her eyes to catch the warm glances of his love. At length the old craftsman went out, and the lovers were left alone. They told over the tales of affection they used to tell in other years, and for an hour the world was shut out from their thoughts.

“O!” murmured Ianthe, after Alaric had imprinted a warm kiss upon her brow in token of the renewal of his most solemn pledges, “now that thou art near me, and my fount of love is full, I begin to fear the dangers which may beset thee!”

“Let us not think of danger now, my beloved,” replied the youth. “This should be a season of joy and happiness unalloyed!”

“Aye, but we should not forget that there is a future,

and that we must be watchful of the joys to-day if we would have them with us henceforth."

"Thou art right, Ianthe. And I will be watchful. I know there is danger in the way, but I fear it not."

At this juncture Bellerus returned in haste, and there was a look of trouble upon his brow. He closed the door behind him, and then turned towards our hero.

"Alaric," he said, evidently striving to assume a calmness which he did not feel, "have you any reason to suppose that your entrance into the city this evening was particularly noticed?"

"Why do you ask?" demanded the youth.

Ianthe had watched her lover's face, and she saw that he was startled; she saw that he had some cause for alarm.

"Speak!" she cried, starting to her feet, and seizing her father by the arm. "He has cause for fear."

"Beloved," spoke Alaric, gently putting her back into her seat, "let us understand this matter. Be not alarmed for me." Then turning to Bellerus he continued:

"Now, what has happened? Why do you ask such a question?"

"First, answer me," returned the old man, hurriedly.

"Well, I think my entrance was particularly noticed."

"And do you think you were followed on your way hither?"

"I thought I was."

"Now, why have you asked all this?" demanded Ianthe, eagerly.

"I'll tell you," answered Bellerus. "I have just come from the inn near the Temple of Diana, where I overheard a conversation between two soldiers who had just come from the Southern gate. They said that a

Greek vessel was seen upon the coast this morning, and that some one landed from her. I also made out, from their conversation, that the king had been informed of the fact, and that he had given orders that every stranger who entered the city should be watched, and intelligence of his whereabouts conveyed to him."

"And does the Sicilian monarch descend to such narrow surveillance?" asked Alaric.

"He is obliged to," replied the mason. "His throne is upon so frail a foundation that a passing breeze of trouble might overthrow it. His fears are constantly excited, and wherever they turn, there he sets his minions upon the watch. The approach of every vessel is reported to him, and if a stranger lands he is sure to be watched until his business is ascertained."

"Then I may be assured that I have been followed," said our hero, "for I suspected it while on my way hither."

"And if such be the case," added Bellerus, "we shall hear more from it."

"But before we wait for that we'll take some steps of our own," cried Ianthe. "Some safe hiding-place must be found."

Alaric was upon the point of speaking when a loud knocking was heard without, and a voice demanded entrance in the name of the king.

"Fly! fly!" cried Ianthe, seizing her lover by the arm.

"Hold," spoke Bellerus, who became calm in the presence of this necessity. "If he flies he will not escape now, for our house may be watched upon all hands; and if he is caught in the act of fleeing, a deeper and more deadly suspicion may fasten upon him."

"Right," quietly returned the youth. "As matters

now, stand if there be danger we must look it in the face. But I trust there may be no cause for alarm."

"Alas ! you know not the fierce cruelty of the wicked king," said Ianthe still clinging to him.

"I know my own honor and innocence," responded the youth, "and I fear not to meet him."

Another thundering knock was heard, and Bellerus started toward the door.

"We must meet it now," he said, "though I wish I had known your coming had been noticed. Ianthe, you had better withdraw."

"Not while—"

"Hush ! In this I must be the judge. For the good of him you love, I bid you seek your own apartment."

"Aye," added the youth, leading her towards the inner court, "do as he bids you. I shall be safe enough. At all events, I will see you again."

He kissed her and blessed her ; and she passed from the apartment just as the host unbarred and opened the outer door. She stopped and caught her lover by the hand ere she left him, and, with a heavy fear upon her heart, she asked him to be careful.

"The thought of thee shall be inducement enough to that end," he replied. "And now may the gods be with us both."

In a few moments more Bellerus returned, and with him came four soldiers. They were stout, hard-looking men, whose hearts performed no other office than to furnish them with animal life that they might do the bidding of their master. One, who wore the uniform of a lieutenant, advanced from his companions and gazed into our hero's face.

"You entered the city this evening?" he said.

Alaric hesitated for a moment, but during that short moment his mind was made up. He quickly judged

that any falsehood might only injure him, and he resolved to tell the whole truth.

“I did,” he answered.

“And you landed from a Greek vessel this morning?”

“Yes.”

“Then you will go with us to the royal palace.”

“But why is this?”

“Because the king has so commanded.”

“Shall I see him to-night?”

“We came not to answer questions—only to command your attendance at the palace,” said the lieutenant, gruffly.

“Our gracious monarch will evidently see you to-night,” interposed Bellerus, who saw the flash of indignation in Alaric’s eye, and feared that he might make matters worse by giving way to his feelings.

The youth saw the old man’s meaning, and he curbed his rising emotions.

“Are you ready to go?” asked the officer.

“At any moment.”

“Then we have nothing further to detain us here.”

Alaric put on his cap, and as they passed out through the narrow passage Bellerus found an opportunity to whisper in his ear :

“Be cautious—keep a guard on your tongue—mention not Ianthe’s name, nor suffer any allusion to her to drop from your tongue. Let us hope that the danger is not great.”

And yet there was a tremulousness in his tone—a terror in his very breathing—that belied the words of hope he spoke. Until this moment the youth had not felt serious alarm, but as he caught the look of horror upon the honest artisan’s face, the bolt struck to his own heart,

"The gods be with thee!" spoke Bellerus, as they reached the porch.

But Alaric made no reply. At that moment a weighty thought was upon him, and before he could call his senses back for an answer he was hurried out into the street. The officer walked by his side, while one of the soldiers led the way, and the other two fell in behind.

A variety of thoughts occupied Alaric's mind as he passed on through the narrow, dimly lighted streets. He remembered how he had seen his father cut down, and how his brother had been butchered; and the same bloody tyrant who had done it had now sent for him. Is it a wonder that, with all his bravery, the youth felt a cold chill creeping about his heart as he approached the lair of the remorseless monarch?

CHAPTER III.

DARKNESS AND DOOM.

Pyrrho, king of Sicily, sat upon his throne of gold and precious stones, and about him were a few of the hardened, cruel, subservient men whom he dared to trust. He was a middle-aged man; short and clumsy in stature; with a face broad and brutal in its expression, and strongly marked by dissipation and debauchery. If he had ever possessed the assurance of a brave man, he had lost it now, and his only hopes of safety were in the willing swords about him, and in the terror which his cruelty inspired. The light from three huge chandeliers of massive gold cast a strange luster over the

large apartment, the beams being here reflected from polished mirrors ; there from pillars of marble and porphyry ; and anon taking deeper hues from the gaudy tapestry that hung upon the walls.

“I would like to know who this stranger can be,” said the monarch, turning to his chamberlain.

“Your majesty may soon see,” replied that high functionary, who seemed a fit man for the place he held under such a master.

“The lieutenant who had the guard at the Pheron gate said he had a suspicious look. By the goddess Diana, I fancy not the free incoming of suspicious men. I tell thee, Donatus, there’s a ripeness among my people even now, which might burst into most exuberant rebellion, from the passing of one hot breath of sedition !”

“I think you overestimate the evil, sire,” replied the chamberlain, Donatus. “There may be uneasy spirits in Syracuse ; but your firm friends are many.”

“I trust they may be,” the king returned, with a nod of the head and a compression of the lips, which would seem to imply that he was prepared for enemies. “But,” he added, in a different tone, though his brow was still dark and contracted, “what of this masonic craftsman, to whose dwelling the stranger was traced ?”

“You speak of Bellerus ?”

“Yes.”

“I know nothing of him save that he is an humble man, and one well versed in his calling. Did you ever suspect otherwise ?”

“If my memory serves me right,” muttered the monarch, bending his head until his brow rested upon his hand, “there was something in his movements, or he was overheard to say something, which did once excite a doubt in my mind. But that was years ago—perhaps

before I became king—so it may pass, and he can be watched if need be. Ah ! here comes the lieutenant. We shall see.”

There was a movement among the guard at the lower end of the chamber, and presently an officer approached the throne, leading Alaric by the arm.

“Is he unarmed ?” the king cried, as his eye rested upon the youth’s tall and sinewy frame.

“He is, sire. We found only a simple sword upon him, and that we took from him.”

A contemptuous look overspread the youth’s face as he thus found a monarch so fearful ; but when he gazed full upon the features of the tyrant who had slain his loved kindred, an expression of deadly hate swept over his noble brow, and a keen fire burned in his dark eye.

“Ye gods !” gasped the king, as he caught a full view of the youth’s face, with this deep expression from the soul upon it, “what have we here ? Come no nearer ! Guard him well ! Who art thou ?”

Had the sword of death been at that moment suspended over our hero’s head, and ready to fall at a breath, he could not have curbed the emotions that swelled in his soul. In all his nature there was not a principle or incentive that could lead him to bow and cringe before one whom he so utterly despised and detested. Had he thought of the future, he might have spoken differently ; but he thought only of the present and of the past, he thought only of the bloody wrongs that had been done, and he allowed his soul to have full sway.

“I am Alaric,” he answered, looking full into Pyrrho’s face.

“*Alaric ! Alaric !* What Alaric art thou ?”

“Hold, sire,” interposed the chamberlain, who had

been regarding the youth narrowly. "Methinks thou shouldst know that face. He is the son of Orneus."

"Ha! Now, by the gods, I know him!" cried the king, starting up from his seat, but quickly sinking back again. "Art thou the son of the patrician Orneus?"

"When my noble father lived I was his son," the prisoner replied.

"And when your noble father died you fled from the country?" said the monarch, with sarcastic emphasis upon the words he had repeated from the youth's speech.

"I did flee," was the reply.

"And have you been absent ever since?"

"I have."

"Where?"

"In Greece."

"Why hast thou returned now?"

"To see the land of my birth."

"And you came for no other purpose?"

"I could have had no other."

"Then why that humble fisher's garb?"

"Because in station I am as humble."

"As the poisonous reptile crouches low upon the earth when on mischief the most intent," said the king, with a look of mingled fear and hatred into the youth's face.

"Those who suspect easily may easily suspect without a cause," replied Alaric, returning the monarch's glance.

"Aye, thou showest in thy speech the spirit of extreme humility thou didst bring with thee. But say, who came with thee?"

"I landed alone upon these shores, your majesty, and

had no thought but to find a friend ; and then, if need be, to leave the country again."

"And who is this friend you sought?"

"A bosom friend of my early youth, whose influence extends not beyond the walls of her home."

"Ah ! a female, eh?"

"Yes."

"And lives she with the artisan Bellerus?"

"I went there to seek her!"

"And there you found her?"

"I heard of her there."

"Answer me !" cried the king in a voice of rage. "By the sacred crown of Jupiter, thou hadst better bite off thine own head than answer me again as thou hast done. Who is this maiden thou hast come to seek?"

Alaric hesitated ere he replied to this. He remembered the warning he had received from Bellerus, and he began to feel that he had been too rash in his speech. But he had no choice now. If he refused to answer, the king could easily send to the dwelling of the mason, and thus matters might be only made worse.

"She is the daughter of Bellerus," he finally said.

The monarch gazed into the youth's face for some moments without speaking. There was a look of deadly meaning upon his hard features, and his fingers moved nervously over his knees. At length he turned to his chamberlain and said :

"This is a curious freak of circumstance. But the young man is like a stranger in our city, and we must provide for him—at least for a while." Then turning to Alaric he added :

"Since I have had thee brought hither against thy will, thou shalt be provided for during the night."

"I can easily provide for myself, sire."

"Aye, but we do not choose that thou shouldst be

put to that inconvenience. We have room enough, and to spare ; and it will afford us true gratification to know that thou art cared for."

Alaric could not mistake the meaning of these words. The look which accompanied them was a sufficient key to their import. But he could do nothing now to help himself. He could only trust to circumstances as they should present themselves.

The king called one of his officers to his side and whispered something into his ear, and then turned once more to the youth.

"It is waxing late now, and we all have need of rest," he said ; "so thou shalt be conducted to a place of safety until to-morrow."

"But sire," interposed our hero, "why should you keep me here to-night ? I can be found when you want me."

"We are not so sure of that. But it is our will that you remain. Hippon, you will conduct him to a place of rest, and report to me when thou hast done it."

The man thus addressed approached our hero, and placed his hand upon his arm.

"Come," he said.

Alaric started as he heard the tones of that voice, for they sounded like a knell. The word was not spoken as speaks one who leads a guest to a quiet chamber.

"Go with him," spoke the king.

Alaric turned, and was led away. In an ante-room his conductor was joined by four dark, sinister-looking men, who had more the appearance of common ruffians than waiters upon a king, and then he was seized by both arms, and hurried on through a vaulted passage to a dimly-lighted corridor. Presently the officer, who was Hippon, the jailer, stopped at a deep niche, where a

guard was posted, and procured a torch, by the glaring light of which he led on once more.

On, through dark and narrow passages, and down, down, down, long and steep stairways, the youth was led; and when his conductors finally stopped, Hippon opened a door of solid metal, which swung out from a jagged wall, and the prisoner was forced roughly in.

"You'll find rest here," the jailer said, raising the torch above his head, so that he might the better gaze around.

It was a narrow, damp, noisome dungeon, far down in the depths of the earth, with no couch, no chair, nothing but the jagged, slimy walls, and the dripping roof and festering floor.

"Why am I here?" the youth cried, as soon as he had opportunity to witness the horrors of the place.

"For safe-keeping, I should judge," replied Hippon, with a cruel leer.

"Is it meant that I shall go out from here alive?"

"You should know the disposition of our gracious majesty well enough to judge of that for yourself, I ween."

As the jailer thus spoke, he motioned for his companions to leave the dungeon, and he was about to follow them, when the prisoner again addressed him:

"Answer me one thing: It can do no harm for me to know the truth. Am I to die here?"

"I know not. Yet I will tell thee this: If it has pleased Pyrrho to determine upon thy death, thou'lt not be kept long in waiting."

With this the man withdrew, and the massive door was closed. It was shut with a dull, heavy sound, the reverberations being drunk up by the solid walls as soon as they fell upon the air, and the prisoner was left in utter darkness. He closed his eyes, and then opened

them again, to see if some glimmer might not be found to break the horrible gloom ; but it was all in vain. He groped his way to the wall, and leaned against it for support, for there was no seat save the floor.

The youth was not long in making up his mind that he had been doomed to death. He knew the character of the monarch, and that no deed would be too evil for him. He knew, also, how fear could make the tyrant more cruel than before, and to what deeds of darkness the fear-stricken usurper could descend.

“And,” mused Alaric, as he wiped the gathering dampness from his brow, “I am one whom he may have occasion to dread. My presence in Syracuse not only calls up old scenes in his own mind, but he knows it must call up the same recollections in the minds of others. My father was much honored by the people, and many who are now living loved him well. My presence would annoy the tyrant, and he will not surely be worried if he can avoid it. I am in his power so completely that hardly a soul in Sicily would know that I was gone. “Woe is me,” he added, after a few moments of silence, “why should I doubt? Why am I here, if it be not to die? My fate has been pronounced in Pyrrho’s mind, and my doom is fixed !”

It was a terrible thought, and for a while Alaric was inclined to blame himself for what he had done ; but when he came to reflect upon the transactions of the day, he could not see how the present result could have been avoided. It had flown from causes over which he could have exercised no control without the power of foreknowledge. He thought of Ianthé, and he wondered if he should ever see her again. The chances were against it, but he was not prepared to give up all hope. He had just started to grope his way around the slimy wall, when he heard the sound of

footsteps without, and presently the moving of bolts fell upon his ear. In a few moments more the door of his dungeon was opened, and three men entered, one of them bearing a flaming torch. They were huge fellows, clad in somber garbs, and each bore a naked sword in his hand. Alaric recognized those garbs, for he had seen them years before, and he knew that only the executioners wore them ! The moment his eye rested upon the grim visitors, he knew that his doom had been spoken, and that the time for execution had come ! Instinctively he placed his hand upon his hip, but there was no weapon there. He was all unarmed, and seemingly powerless against the gigantic ruffians. The man who held the torch leaned it up against the wall, where a projecting point of rock helped support it, and then the three approached the prisoner.

“How now ?” spoke Alaric. “What is your business here ?”

“A foul business you’d say if you knew it, my master,” replied the leader of the infernal trio, in an unfeeling tone ; “but when ’tis done, we’ll do it so well you won’t know we’ve done it at all.”

Was there any mistaking this ?

“I am to die !” the youth said, with his hands clasped upon his bosom.

“We’ve all got to die some time, and those who die first will get the sooner out of a very wicked world. And since you know what’s coming, I suppose you’ll take it as easily as possible.”

What a lifetime of thought and feeling was crowded into the next moment ! The three gleaming swords were raised, and the doomed youth saw them pointing surely toward his heart. There was no escape by flight, for between him and the door advanced the workmen of death ! There was no hope in his own

strength of body and limb, for, unarmed as he was, the power opposed to him was unconquerable. So he leaned back against the reeking wall, and shut the horrid monsters from his sight.

CHAPTER IV.

STRATEGEMS.

When Alaric's thoughts were all given up to death, he resigned himself to his fate without an effort ; but in the moment that followed the bowing of his head he thought of Ianthé, and the resolution to live came upon him, and with it came an impulse to his will which gave fresh vigor to his faculties. The fatal points were close upon his bosom, and in a moment more the tide of his life would be let forth.

"Hold !" he cried, in a tone so deep and startling that the three executioners stopped, and dropped the points of their weapons as though some unseen hand had held them. "The king fears me?" he added, when he saw that the attention of the ruffians had been distracted from their work of blood.

"I know not," replied one of the trio, in a half-savage tone.

"But I know," resumed Alaric. "Were it not so, he would not have sent you here to put me to death. But I will not ask you to disobey your master."

"It would benefit you little if you did ask," said the ruffian with an assuring shake of the head.

"I know your office too well to hope for mercy at your hands," continued the youth, with some show of mystery

in his manner ; “ but ere I die I would confide to your keeping a secret which may not only benefit the king, but which may be the means of advancement to yourselves.”

“ If you have a secret, let us have it, for we have no time to waste.”

“ It is a secret of the utmost importance to the king. Here, it is all upon this piece of parchment,” pursued Alaric in quick, eager tones. He placed his hand within his bosom as he spoke, and when he drew it forth he added : “ Take this to his majesty when I am dead, and bid him look well to the men whose names are therein written. It will serve you a good turn—”

At this moment the leader of the ruffians had advanced to take the parchment which he supposed he was going to receive, and his sword was so carelessly held that our hero, watching his opportunity with a keen eye, caught at it and secured it, and, before the disarmed executioner could fully realize what had transpired, he was laid prostrate upon the pavement with his head almost severed from his body.

Alaric had no fear now. With the heavy sword in his grasp he leaped into a corner, and placed himself upon his guard. The remaining executioners, as soon as they saw the fate of their companion, and realized that the prisoner was armed, sprang upon him with fierce execrations. With a lightning-like movement the youth leaped into the opposite corner, thereby avoiding the thrusts which were aimed at him, and as he turned he dealt the man nearest him a blow which staggered him. Without waiting for a fresh attack, he sprang upon the other ruffian before he had fully recovered himself, and easily slew him. The second man had somewhat recovered himself, and now set upon the youth with wild fury ; but the blood was streaming over his face from

the wound he had received, and his sight was far from being sure. Alaric glided easily away from his blows, and finally gave him a thrust that placed him beyond the power of further effort.

As soon as the youth saw that his three dark visitors were thus safely disposed of, he caught up the torch and made his way from the dungeon ; but ere he had gone far, he remembered that his garb might too easily be recognized, and he thought it safe to make some kind of an exchange with one of the fallen men. So he went back, and having taken the frock from the second man he had slain, he put it on over his own, and then buckled the broad leathern belt about his loins. To this he suspended the scabbard of the sword he had first taken, and when he had donned the large black cap, he once more left the cell. He remembered the way which he had come, and he followed it back until he had ascended two flights of steps, and reached the entrance of the long corridor, within which stood the guard of whom Hippon had obtained the torch. Here he stopped, for he dared go no further in that direction. An alarm, now that he had reached the ground floor of the palace, might cost him his life. He saw a narrow passage leading off to the right, and from the direction it took, and the current of fresh air which came through it, he judged that it must lead to the rear court. He entered it, and pressed on, still keeping the torch, which burned with a bright, flaring flame. At some distance he came to a descent of four broad steps, and when he had gone down these the way grew wider ; and in a few minutes he came upon a boy, who seemed to be asleep by a low door. The youngster started to a sitting posture as our hero came up to him, and having rubbed his eyes till he fancied he could see, he looked up.

"Minerva save us!" he ejaculated, with a shudder. "Are ye going to kill anybody out here?"

"Not if you keep quiet," replied Alaric, as he passed on. But he hesitated ere he had gone many steps, and turned back. He might press this fellow into some service.

"Look ye, boy," he said, holding the torch so that as little light as possible should shine into his own face, "you belong here, don't you?"

"Yes, master. I'm one of the wine-keeper's boys," replied the little fellow, getting upon his feet.

"And you are well acquainted with the doors and passages hereabout?"

"Yes."

"You sometimes slip out of a night, when there's nobody to watch you?"

"No, no, master, I can go into the court when I please."

Alaric cast his eyes about him to see that no one else was near, and then said, in a low, resolute tone :

"I would not willingly harm you, boy, and if you will conduct me in safety from this place no evil shall befall you ; but if you hesitate or refuse, this sword shall—"

"Mercy ! mercy ! good master !" the fellow cried, clasping his hands in terror.

"Hush ! Make no noise. If you will conduct me safely to the outer court, no harm shall come to you."

"But aren't you one of the king's—"

"Never mind what I am. Will you guide me, or shall I—"

"Mercy !" uttered the boy again, as he saw the point of the sword raised. "Don't kill me. I'll do anything you say."

"Then mark me : Conduct me from the palace as speedily as possible. If you hesitate, or lead me into

danger, you shall die on the instant ; but if you guide me out as I have said, I will do you no injury. Now what say you—can you do it ?”

The boy contrived after a while to overcome his fright, and when he found that there was no present danger he seemed to reason more calmly, though his look and bearing plainly showed that he feared the stern man who stood by him.

“ I can lead you to the rear court,” he said, “ but the walls are very high, and guards are stationed at every outlet.”

“ Is there not some door or gate by which I can gain the public street ?”

“ Good Bacchus !” ejaculated the boy, gazing into his interlocutor’s face with wonder. “ You must be a new man among the executioners. I thought everybody in Syracuse knew that no possible avenue to the palace was left unguarded.”

“ Well, well,” said our hero, who liked not to stand in the passage, “ lead me to the court.”

“ Then follow me.”

“ But my torch—I would not have that seen.”

“ You may carry it to the end of this corridor, and then we shall be in the open air,” replied the boy.

Alaric followed him until he stood upon the pavement of the lower court.

“ There is the bath,” said the youthful guide, pointing to a large structure of white marble, close at hand ; “ and beyond is the bakery. The wall runs all round, and the posterns are guarded.”

“ Is there not some private way, to which you can gain the key ?” asked Alaric, after he had thrown aside the extinguished torch.

“ I don’t know of any, sir.”

“ And how is it about leaving the court at this time of

night? What is necessary to enable one to pass the guard?"

"A pass from the chief, who keeps his station in the great hall, where all must go out and come in who leave the palace."

"What's this pass?"

"A ticket of brass."

"And all who go out have one?"

"Yes."

"And if they have such a pass, the guards ask no questions?"

"Not often."

Alaric saw very plainly that he was not free yet, and he might have to resort to some further stratagem ere he could gain the public highways.

"Boy," he said, after he had reflected awhile, "If I let you go now, will you return directly to the place where I found you, and say nothing of having seen me?"

"I will, my master."

"But how may I know that you will do it?"

"I pray that the furies may fly away with me if I tell a lie," replied the boy, earnestly.

Alaric believed, from what he had seen of the lad, that he might trust him—that is, he believed a sense of fear would lead him to hasten back and keep quiet; so he resolved to let him go. First, however, he asked him where the gate was which was most used at night; and the little fellow pointed out a high tower upon the wall, and said the gate was directly under it.

"And now," said our hero, "I want you to remember one thing: If I get safely out all will be well; but if I am detected through your means, I shall most surely see you again."

"Holy Jupiter crush me, and great Vulcan pound me into hot iron, if I ever say a word!" cried the boy

earnestly and devoutly. "If you won't hurt me, I will never speak a word of you."

Alaric let the fellow go, and when he had gone from his sight he turned towards the tower, which he could plainly see looming up against the sky. A walk of smooth pavement led to it, and when he had come near enough to distinguish the gate-way, he stopped. He could see the forms of several soldiers lounging about, their bright spear-heads gleaming in the light of the heavy lamp that hung within the arch, and he quickly made up his mind that mere physical force would be of no service there ; so he wandered back until he had gained the shelter of a large olive tree, where he stopped to consider. He knew it would be of no use to attempt to scale the wall, for that was built on purpose to resist all such efforts, either from without or from within. Yet he must find some means of escape, and the sooner the better. He judged that it was then not far from midnight, and the guard would soon be relieved.

While he stood thus pondering, he heard footsteps at no great distance, and pretty soon he saw a dusky form approaching from one of the wings of the palace. As the paved walk led close by the tree, he remained still, and watched the coming pedestrian. In a few minutes he could see that it was a man, and, in a few more, that it was a servant, as the garb presented no ornament to reflect the starbeams. Alaric's course was quickly resolved upon, and having assured himself that no one else was approaching, he stepped out to the side of the walk just as the stranger came along.

"A fair evening," said our hero, stepping to the edge of the walk.

The man stopped and gazed at the speaker. He was a middle-sized person, and, from his garb, appeared to be a servant in the purveyor's department.

"Are you going out?" Alaric continued.

"Of course I'm going out," returned the serving-man, rather huffily. "I hope the king hasn't placed his deathmen over us for guards."

"Not at all," responded Alaric. "But if you will listen a moment, I can give you a piece of news that may make your fortune."

"Eh? A fortune?" echoed the fellow, forgetting that his companion wore the garb of a common executioner.

"Yes. Have you a pass?"

"Of course I have. I shouldn't be on my way in this direction without it." And as the man spoke he drew a triangular plate of brass from his pocket.

"Are you going out on business, or merely for pleasure?"

"For pleasure, of course. One needs pleasure after lugging provisions all the day long."

"Will you be out long?"

"Till daylight."

"Then you will have plenty of time. Come this way—beneath this tree—and I will tell you the secret. But you will not divulge it?"

"You can depend upon me."

"If it yield thee not more than a thousand broad pieces of silver, and a full purveyor's office, then I'll quit the palace myself," said Alaric, as he saw the fellow hesitate.

At this the man started up, and in a few moments stood beneath the olive tree.

"Now, what is it?" he asked.

"Dost see where yonder star almost touches the top of the temple?"

"Aye," responded the other, gazing in the direction pointed out.

And while he yet gazed at the star, Alaric gave him a

blow upon the ear that felled him to the earth, and without loss of time, he drew his sword and knelt upon his breast.

"Breathe but a single word, and thou art a dead man!" the youth said, in a tone which carried conviction with it.

"Don't murder me!" gasped the fallen man. "What is it? What mean you?"

"Only for you to keep perfectly quiet, and obey me," responded Alaric, with the point of his sword at the fellow's heart. "If you make no attempt to thwart me, you shall be free from all harm. Let me bind this scarf over your mouth."

The purveyor's man made some objection, but the unmistakable manner in which the sword was presented to his bosom soon brought him into subjection, and he suffered himself to be gagged. Alaric then made him exchange clothes with him, for he wished not to venture into the streets habited in the blood-marked garments he now wore; and when this was done he possessed himself of the brass ticket, and concealed his sword beneath his new frock. Thus prepared, he took one more look at the prostrate man, and when assured that all was safe in that quarter, he started for the gate. He pulled the long locks of hair well over his temples, drew the cap down over his brow, and walked boldly to the post of the guard. He made a trivial remark about the lateness of the hour as he exhibited his pass, and the sentinel, who seemed to be waiting anxiously for the relief guard, simply glanced at it, and gruffly bade him pass on.

In a very short time Alaric was in the public street, and without stopping long to consider, he hurried on. He remembered the way from the palace to the quarter where Bellerus lived, and he concluded to seek the old

mason's residence first, trusting that, if necessary, he would thence find some place of concealment. He was resolved to get out of the city as soon as possible, and take Ianthe with him, knowing that upon the shores of Greece he could find a home where peace and joy might be his. He had forgotten the startling thought which had been called to his mind at the Hermit's Cave ; or, if it still dwelt in his memory, the thought of happiness with his beloved overcame it. He had seen enough of Syracuse to assure him that, while Pyrrho sat upon the throne, there could be no peace for him within its walls. Had he returned to his native city for vengeance alone he might have felt differently ; but he came for love, and he willingly sought no strife.

Swiftly the youth hurried on, avoiding the few people who yet remained in the streets, and keeping his features hidden as much as possible. He would find Bellerus, and at once secure a place of safe retreat from the myrmidons of the tyrant whom he was convinced would be ere long pursuing him.

CHAPTER V.

ROYAL PERPLEXITY.

Pyrrho had determined that he would not retire until he had heard the final account from his prisoner.

“Donatus,” he said, to his chamberlain, who was alone with him, save the twelve black slaves who stood behind the throne, “I have strange presentiments in connection with this youth, Alaric. I speak freely with

you, because I know that the hour which sees me fall must also witness your demise."

And the king spoke truly here. He felt sure of the faith of his chief officers only because their fates were inseparably linked with his own. They had become so obnoxious to the people that the power of the throne, and fear of the royal vengeance, alone kept the hand of vengeance from them. Full well did the royal chamberlain, and the chief jailer, and the captain of the guard, and all the centurions know that if Pyrrho should fall they would most assuredly fall with him. And so they were bound to him by the very tie of their own lives.

"You may be sure of my honor, sire," replied Donatus, "without the spur of fear. Yet I know we stand or fall together."

"I thought not of questioning your loyalty, good Donatus. It was a mere passing thought, and I gave it utterance. But of this Alaric: I have old recollections, old dreams, old presentiments called up by his presence."

"Yet your majesty will soon be rid of them."

"How so?"

"The youth must be dead ere this, if the executioners perform their work as they usually do."

"I know. Those stout villains are men of few words. Their swords are more ready than their tongues. But it is not alone of this youth that my thoughts are troubled. Years ago there was some whisper of Bellerus, at whose house this Alaric was found. I was only a general then, and Glaucus was king. Had I been king I might have followed it out. I have had the old mason watched, but nothing has appeared against him. All his ingoings and outgoings are of the most seemly character. But this event has revived the doubts, and I mean to fathom them."

"I remember something of this, sire," said the chamberlain, thoughtfully.

"Ah—do you?"

"Yes. I call it to mind now."

"Can you remember any particular?"

"Let me think. Aye, I have it now. It was while Glaucus was trembling on his throne through fear of his general, Basilus. The craftsman, Bellerus, in company with some of his fellows, said, that he *might live to see the time when a word from his lips would empty the throne of Sicily, and fill it anew.*"

"Aye, Donatus, thou art right," cried the king. "I remember now. And I remember that some importance was given to the man's saying at the time; though, if I remember right, he declared most solemnly that he spoke only in jest."

"It was so," replied the chamberlain; "and there the matter rested."

"And there it may rest for the present," added the king. And thus speaking he turned towards the small door by the throne and clapped his hands. A page entered at the signal, and Pyrrho bade him go and call the chief jailer.

"Come, come, Hippon," the monarch said, addressing that official as he entered, "it is high time thou brought'st a report from the executioners."

"I have been waiting for them, sire."

"Have they not had time to do their work?"

"Plenty."

"Then seek them, and bring me word."

The jailer hurried from the royal presence, and when he was gone the king began to walk to and fro with nervous steps.

"Thou art troubled, sire," spoke Donatus, as he watched Pyrrho's changing countenance.

"Aye, I am troubled," was the quick response. "I feel not as I would wish to feel. Doubts and fears are hanging about me like bad dreams."

"And are they not mere dreams after all?"

"I don't know." The king strode hastily across the wide apartment several times, and then he stopped and added—

"I tell thee the earth is fervid beneath our feet, and at the least opening the volcano might burst forth. Donatus," he continued, seizing the chamberlain by the hand, and gazing eagerly into his face, "why should you and I try to hide the truth from our own comprehension? I tell thee again—the air is hot in Syracuse, and at times I feel it burn as I breathe it. We must be wary and prompt. If there be those upon whom suspicion can rest—no matter how slightly—they must be put from off the face of the earth! Dost comprehend?"

"Aye, sire; and most fully do I agree with thee."

"I'll keep my eyes open, Donatus, and if the earth shows a disposition to heave in any one spot, upon that spot the sword shall be laid."

"Right, sire. I know how suddenly a great fire can grow from one chance spark."

"And we'll put those sparks out. Blood is an excellent thing with which to quench them."

At this point the jailer returned. He came in without ceremony, and his face was pale, and his body trembled.

"How now?" cried the king, as soon as he saw the officer's strange agitation. "Speak! What has happened?"

"The prisoner has escaped!"

"Fool! I spoke of the youth Alaric."

"And of him I speak," returned Hippon.

"But *he* has not escaped?"

"Yes, sire."

"Now, by the gods, thou liest! Thou didst tell me he was safely lodged within the deepest dungeon of the palace; and from thence mortal man ne'er yet escaped!"

"But, sire," cried the jailer, "let me explain. The prisoner has hewn his way over your executioners. He has slain them all three, and thus passed out."

"But he had no weapon."

"He must have first disarmed one of the executioners, for the chief of the trio had been stripped of his sword, and another of his raiment."

"Is this true?" asked the king, grasping his jailer by the shoulder.

"Just as I have told thee, sire."

"And what have ye done?"

"I have started the guards through every avenue of the palace, and sent some to the court."

"Then haste thee away and bring me intelligence of the result. He cannot have passed the guard, and so he cannot have left the palace."

Hippon left the royal presence, and when he was gone the king turned to his chamberlain.

"Now by the fires of Tartarus!" he cried, smiting his hands together, "this exceeds all belief. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"Never, sire."

"To kill three of my executioners! To rob that gigantic villain of his sword! By the crown of Jupiter, he has the hiss of the volcano in him. But he cannot have escaped."

"I should think not, sire."

After this the monarch paced to and fro across the apartment, and finally sank down upon the base of one

of the pillars by the throne, where he remained until the jailer returned.

“Ha, good Hippon,” he cried, starting to his feet, “have ye secured him?”

“No, sire. He has fled from the palace.”

“Out upon thee for a liar now! He could not have fled. My walls no mortal can overcome, and my guards are incorruptible!”

“Let me speak, sire,” urged Hippon, trembling with apprehension. “The prisoner has used a most curious strategem to accomplish this. Beneath the old olive tree, near the bath, we found a servant of the purveyor, named Osephus. He was bound hand and foot and a firm stop was put upon his mouth. He told us, when we had set him free, how a man, clad in the habiliments of an executioner, set upon him and knocked him senseless upon the earth, and then bound him and gagged him, and robbed him of his garments and his pass, and then made off. Upon going to the gate we learned that a man wearing the garb of the purveyor’s servitor, had passed out about half an hour before.”

“Have ye sent for him?” demanded the king, grinding his teeth with rage.

“No sire. I dared not order out—”

“’Tis well,” interrupted Pyrrho, striding across the apartment, and striking a bell which hung by one of the hidden doors. In a moment the captain of the royal guard made his appearance.

“Claudian,” spoke the monarch, “didst see the prisoner, Alaric, who was brought hither this night?”

“I did, sire,” replied the captain.

“Then mark me well. He has escaped. Select the swiftest and surest of thy men, and send one to each of the gates, with this order to the guard: That no person be allowed to leave the city, upon any pretext

whatever, till further orders. And if, at any gate, a man has passed out within the last hour, who was not well and surely known, have swift pursuers put upon his track. Hasten with this, and send your lieutenant hither as you go."

With a quick step the captain left the royal presence, and presently the lieutenant entered.

"I think," said the king, turning to his chamberlain "that the youth may have gone direct to the house of Bellerus."

"Very likely he may have stopped there for a while," returned Donatus; "but I should hardly think he would remain there."

"At all events, I shall send for him there, and I'll have all in the house arrested and brought hither."

"But, sire, be careful."

"Of what!"

"Of this Bellerus. The more I think of him, the more I fear him."

"Fear so humble a man?" muttered the king, half to himself.

"There may be reasons for it. But still we should arrest him, though it should be carefully done. We may solve all our doubts, if we can but have him in our power awhile."

"But where can be the harm supposing we arrest and execute him?"

"Why, look ye, sire; he is one of a large class of which we know but little. I have heard it said that the craftsmen of our city—the cunning artificers and the sturdy workmen—all, of both high and low degree—from the chief architect to the hewer of stone and the bearer of burdens—are bound together by mystic ties; and that it is a holy fraternity."

"I have heard of such a thing," returned Pyrrho, "but

I gave it no credence. Think you there is reason in the rumor?"

"I think there may be, sire. I have heard that they worship an unseen deity—that they acknowledge but one God, whom they call Jehovah, and that they hold his name in such veneration that they will not pronounce it save in sanctified places."

"Why! such is the name of an Eastern deity," said the king. "A nation called Israel worship such an one."

"Aye," responded Donatus, "and these craftsmen have surely brought the worship hither."

"Then, by the Fates! we must have the old mason here. I would examine him."

"But be cautious, sire. We know not who may be his friends, nor how much stir his arrest and punishment might make."

"I will use all caution, Donatus, and if this organization have an existence in our midst, I must know it. What, ho, there! Fingal!"

The lieutenant approached the king, and bowed his head.

"Thou didst arrest the houth at the house of Bel-lerus," said Pyrrho.

"I did, sire."

"You knew he had escaped?"

"Yes. The captain told me so."

"Then take a strong guard and make all haste to that same house, and find Aleric if you can. If he has been there, and is gone, then send all whom you may find in the house hither under suitable guard, and lay upon his track till morning. Be quiet about it, and make as little show as possible."

With this the lieutenant turned away, and the king and his chamberlain were once more alone. The monarch

paced up and down the apartment for some moments, and when he finally stopped, he placed his hand upon the shoulder of his companion, and looked him earnestly in the face.

“Donatus,” he said, “I have an idea—one that I have long been in need of. By the horns of Pan, but I’ll be my own executioner henceforth !”

“How so, sire ?” asked the chamberlain, in surprise.

“I’ll tell thee when the time comes. Thou knowest the old vault in the closet beyond my private bath ?”

“Yes.”

“And what think you it was built for ?”

“I always supposed some previous king must have digged for water there. It is very deep, is it not ?”

“Aye ! as deep as darkness itself. By the gods, it is a glorious thought !”

And for a while the king almost forgot the flight of his prisoner in the new and strange idea which had presented itself to his mind.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE IS SAVED ; BUT WHERE IS THE OTHER ?

Alaric reached the door of Bellerus’ dwelling in safety, but he hesitated ere he knocked for admittance. He supposed, as soon as his escape was discovered, that search would be made for him there, and for awhile he thought of seeking elsewhere. But upon deliberating further, he thought it safe enough just to let the old man know of his situation, and, perhaps, seek his aid in gaining a final escape. So he thumped upon the hollow

post, and in a few moments Bellerus made his appearance.

"How? Back so soon?" cried the artisan, as he beheld the youth.

"Hush! Speak not so loudly here," quickly returned Aleric, gliding into the narrow hall. "I have come back with a thousand times more danger at my heels than I had when I left. Let us seek your closet, and there I will tell you more."

Without further question the old man led the way to an inner apartment, where Ianthe speedily joined them. She had not been able to sleep, and the first sound of her lover's voice had brought her from her chamber. She hastened to his side, and looking up into his face she murmured :

"Thou wilt not think it unseemly that I should be thus forward? but O, my beloved! when they took thee away I was sore afraid, for full well I knew the cruelty of him who had sent for thee. O, after so many years—when our love was just beaming into full light—it would have been—but thou art pale, my beloved. Thy hand trembles. Is there danger still? O, tell me!"

"Sweet one," cried the youth, pressing the fond maiden to his bosom, and then gently putting her away into a seat, "I will tell thee all, and then we can consider. But I must be brief, and we must be cool and deliberate when I am done."

And thereupon Aleric related the adventures which had befallen him since he went to the royal palace. He told the story in as few words as possible, but he told it all, just as it had happened.

"And now," he added, when it was done, taking Ianthe by the hand, "surely there can be no more safety for me here. Will it not be better for us to leave Sicily forever?"

“Yes, yes,” cried the maiden, throwing her arm about his neck. “We will go, and my father shall go with us.”

“We can find a bright and peaceful home upon the shores of Greece. In Corinth there is a sweet vale, where the sun is bright, and where the flowers live through all the year. My ambition is all of love, and thou art my chiefest hope. I have seen enough of turmoil in my day, and I love it not.”

“But suppose you could be king of Sicily?” said Bellerus, in a light, jesting tone—a tone so totally out of place on the occasion that even he noticed it as soon as he had spoken, and quickly added, “would you not wear the sword for the good of your country?”

“Aye, most gladly,” replied the youth. “But, alas! I have not the power. If my unhappy country is ever freed from the yoke of bondage she now bears, it must be by the hand of some more favored child of fortune. You will go with us, father?”

The old man gazed from Alaric to the maiden but he made no reply.

“I know he will go,” said Ianthe. “He loves me, and would not see me miserable. Wherever thou goest, Alaric, I will go; and where thy home is, there shall Ianthe find her abiding-place. Even upon the verge of Elysium, I would cling to thee, if thou couldst not enter the blessed abode. I know my father will go.”

Bellerus arose from his seat and started across the room. He was in deep perplexity, and his head was bowed in thought.

“Alaric,” he said, stopping and placing his hand upon the youth’s shoulder, “we must speak of this at some other time. We could not leave the city to-night if we would.”

“And why not?” asked our hero. “Why not pass

out at once, before any alarm has been given of my escape?"

"Ah! there will be no alarm given at all," returned the old man, with a shake of the head. "Our king is not fond of creating alarms, he does not consider it good policy. His first movement, upon learning of your escape, will be to send an order to every gate forbidding any one to pass out. That may have been done even now, so that to attempt to leave the city would only be to rush upon the surest danger."

"You may be right," admitted Alaric upon reflection.

"I know I am right. And now, the next thing is to find a place of present safety which cannot be here, of course. Yet I can conduct you to a place where Pyrrho and all his myrmidons shall search in vain for you; and when you are once there, we can then make such arrangements for the future as circumstances may warrant. And the sooner we seek such a retreat the better. Ianthe will be safe here until I return."

"But why may I not go with him?" pleaded the maiden.

"That cannot be. It is no ordinary hiding-place to which I shall take him, and thou couldst not gain entrance, even though a friendship greater than mine asked it for thee. But I will not be long gone, and when I return thou wilt have the satisfaction of knowing that Alaric is safe."

Ianthe quickly saw that she might stand in the way of her lover's escape if she resisted further, so she bade her father make all possible haste. Then she turned to Alaric, and rested upon his bosom for a few moments. She finally kissed him, and tried to appear cheerful as she turned away.

"Bar the door when we are gone," said Bellerus, "and should any one chance to come, tell them I

shall return very shortly. If you are asked whither I am gone, say that you do not know."

"But suppose the king's soldiers should come, and ask if Alaric has been here?"

"Then tell them boldly that he has, and that he went away again. They can guard the house until I return, and then search if they wish. But I will not give them much time for troubling you."

Had the old artisan thought less of Alaric, he might have thought more of Ianthé, and taken some different step, though he could then think of nothing which he could do for her additional safety. He must go with the youth—that was a plain duty—and he could not take her with him; so what has he to do but to leave her? However, he did not apprehend danger on that score, so he turned all his thoughts upon our hero. He heard the outer door barred behind him, and then he stepped quickly into the street, followed closely by the fugitive from royal vengeance.

"Now," said Bellerus, as they turned from the dwelling, "we must hasten with all due speed, for I would return before the soldiers, if any be sent, can reach my house. We have not far to go."

"But you do not think Ianthé can be in any danger?" returned Alaric, uneasily.

"No, I do not. If the guard should chance to come they would wait until I returned, for I do not mean to be long gone. Be under no apprehension on her account. If we can provide for your safety we shall accomplish enough."

They had reached a point where the street branched off to the right and left, the first branch leading in a circular way towards one of the main gates, while the other was narrower, and soon became lost in circuitous, dubious passages. The former was the nearest

and the old man took it, keeping well under the shade of the buildings, and moving along at a swift pace. Presently they came to an open square, within which was a public fountain, and here they found the moonbeams breaking in upon them. It was past midnight, and the moon, which was waning in size, had just arisen above the walls.

"This will make it lighter than I could wish," said Bellerus, "but we'll push on."

He had hardly spoken when quick, loud footsteps were heard upon the pavements at no great distance. They stopped, as if by a mutual instinct, and listened.

"Which way are they coming?" asked Alaric.

"I think from yonder avenue," replied Bellerus, pointing to the left.

"It sounds to me differently," said the youth.

"Surely they are off here," pointing to the right.

So they listened again.

"It is the echo deceives you," remarked the mason, bending his ear to the ground.

"It may be," admitted Alaric, "for, to tell the truth, I cannot now assure myself. First they sound in this direction and then in that."

"I think they are to the left," added Bellerus, with assurance, "so we had better keep on. We have but a few steps to go beyond the square."

With this the two friends pursued their way with a quicker step. They had crossed the open place, and were upon the point of turning into a street which led off towards the great northern tower of the city wall, when they stopped again, for the echoing footsteps were now plainly enough to be heard directly ahead of them.

"If these are soldiers, we are in the lion's mouth," said Bellerus.

“Let us keep on,” returned Alaric. “It may be worse if we turn back.”

“We cannot well turn back.”

They were just starting to cross the street when they were met by the king’s lieutenant, Fingal, with a guard of three men. It was too late to avoid them, and they moved on as if nothing had happened to disconcert them.

“Hold !” ordered the officer.

“What shall we do?” whispered the old artisan, stopping, and turning to his companion.

“Are they after me, think you?” the youth asked.

“They must be. That is Fingal, one of the lieutenants of the royal guard. He is after some one, or he would not be here with those men.”

“I shall defend myself to the last,” said Alaric. “An arrest is sure death to me. I will die here first. You have no arms?”

“None.”

“Then leave them to me. If I fall—”

“But,” interrupted the old man, “let me consider.”

“What time have we for that? See !”

As our hero spoke, the lieutenant had advanced with his men, and now stood only a few feet off. The moonlight lay full upon the place, and the two parties had no difficulty in distinguishing outlines plainly.

“Thou art Bellerus,” the officer said, gazing sharply upon the old man.

“I am,” replied the latter. He trembled as he spoke, for he began to realize the full force of the position in which he was placed. Alaric noticed the quivering of his frame ; and, though the lieutenant had addressed him, yet he paid no attention to it but determined first to speak with his friend. So he glided close to Bellerus’ side, and whispered in his ear ;

"Speak, answer me truly! For your own sake, would you have me deliver myself up without resistance?"

"No! no!" replied the artisan, with sudden energy. "I am as nothing. Thou art all here. Thy fate alone hangs upon the issue of this meeting."

"Enough!" cried Alaric. And then he turned towards the officer.

"Art thou deaf and dumb?" shouted the latter in a tone of vexation.

"No. I can hear very plainly," returned the youth, "and you see that I can speak."

"Then why do you not answer me? I asked thee if thou wert not Alaric."

"No matter who or what I am."

"Aye, but it does matter, for I think thou art one whom I seek. Thou canst not hide thy face, if thy name is denied."

"I never denied my name, sir. I only doubt your right to question me."

"So, so," muttered Fingal, drawing his sword, and taking a step forward. "Let me tell thee that I have authority and power, and that I have come to arrest thee. You will suffer yourself to be bound by these men, and you shall then know my further pleasure."

At this the three soldiers advanced, but Alaric stepped back, and put forth his hand. They stopped at the motion, for there was an air of command in it which they instinctively recognized.

"Allow me to speak one word," the youth said. "I wish to be quiet and peaceable; and I shall be so if you pass on and leave me to myself. I mean no harm to any living thing, nor will I suffer harm to myself if I can help it. You, sir, know that I have been once to the royal palace."

“Aye, and I know the method of thy escape,” replied Fingal.

“Then thou knowest for what thy master wants me now. Say, dost thou not?”

“I can imagine, as thou canst.”

“And think ye I will go willingly to the shambles? Thou knowest the tyrant seeks me only that he may take my life. Now I tell thee, sir lieutenant, that, if I am permitted, I will go in peace from Sicily; but I will not willingly lay my head beneath the executioner’s sword. If thou hast the heart to do a right thing, let me go.”

“Fool!” cried the officer. “Dost think I am a child to do my duty thus?”

“No, I thought thou mightst be a man, and as such I addressed thee.”

“I am a man, and an officer; and as an officer I must do my duty. I trust that we shall not be called upon to use force.”

“I trust thou will not attempt it,” returned our hero, at the same drawing forth the heavy executioner’s sword which had been concealed beneath his frock.

“How!” exclaimed the lieutenant, in surprise, as he saw this movement. “Would ye offer resistance to the king’s guard?”

“Ye know what I did to the king’s executioners,” was the quick reply. “If I go to the palace I go to die. I prefer to die here. But, beware—for by the gods, I shall give thee hot work, and plenty of it.”

Fingal had been too long a soldier, and had performed too often the duties of his present office, to hesitate before a single arm. He turned to his men, and ordered them to arrest the youth.

“Come thou first,” cried Alaric.

“By the Furies, I will!” returned the lieutenant. And

as he spoke he rushed upon Alaric, and aimed a furious blow at his head. The youth was almost sorry for the opportunity thus offered him, for he could not refuse the advantage, and yet it seemed a cruel work to take life so easily. He only stepped aside from the mad blow, and, at the same time, drove his sword home beneath his opponent's left arm. Fingal staggered back and fell as he was shaken off, and at this moment the three soldiers set upon the youth in a body.

"By the Lost Word!" muttered Bellerus to himself, "this must not be. If we leave none of these fellows to tell the tale of their death, the king may find out the doers as best he can. The boy must not die!"

He seized the sword of the fallen officer while he spoke, and on the next instant he was at work. He handled the weapon as one who knew its use, and he brought to its service a set of thews and sinews of more than ordinary power. At the first sweep he clove a head in twain, and the remaining soldier turned half way, as though he would flee; but he was not to get away so easily. The stout craftsman had gone into the work upon compulsion and he meant not that one should escape to condemn him; so he sprang upon the turning soldier, and, with one blow, laid him upon the pavement.

"I think the work is done," he said, throwing the bloody sword which he had used down by the side of its rightful owner; "and now let us make all haste. I think these were not all the guards who were sent out, and I would get back to my house before any reach there."

"I am ready," replied Alaric, returning his own sword to its sheath. "We may leave these fellows without fear, for they can tell no tales."

"Of course, they are all dead," added Bellerus, hesitatingly.

“It will take but a moment to see.”

An examination was held, and the four men were found to be utterly dead ; and then the artisan started up and moved quickly on his way. Ere long he reached the paved court of a magnificent structure, before which he stopped.

“This is the Temple of Diana,” said Alaric, gazing up at the white columns.

“I know it,” was the laconic reply.

“But you do not stop here?”

“Be surprised at nothing you may now see. Follow me, and fear no danger.”

Thus speaking, Bellerus led the way to the inner colonnade, thence across the ground-floor of the temple, and when he stopped it was within a closed apartment, from which all light was excluded.

“Alaric,” spoke the old craftsman, in a deep, solemn tone, at the same time taking the youth by the arm, “I am about to stake my own life for your honor and secrecy ; and before I do so I will ask one simple pledge from you in return : You must never allow a word to escape your lips of your having been within this temple. Will you, if necessary, give up your own life rather than have the secret drawn from you ?”

“I will,” answered Alaric ; and he shuddered with a strange awe as he spoke, for there came to him a memory of some mystic tie that had bound his father to the humble craftsmen of the city ; and he now remembered that four stout hewers of stone had borne him from the scene of blood on the fatal night when his kindred were slain.

“It is well,” responded Bellerus. “You must now suffer me to blindfold you, for such are our laws. I will remain with you while you are in darkness.”

Alaric offered not a word in objection. The thought

that his humble friend could enter the great temple of Diana, and be master of its mysteries, so filled his mind with wonder that he hesitated not to trust his further power. The old man bound a scarf firmly over his eyes, and then led him on. The youth knew that he passed through large halls, and through winding passages ; and ever and anon they were stopped by sentinels, with whom Bellerus whispered a few hurried sentences, and then passed on. Finally, their way was down—down long, winding steps—then across a smoothly paved floor, and at length they stopped, and the bandage was removed from Alaric's eyes. He found himself in a vaulted chamber, the roof supported by pillars of the purest marble ; the walls composed of porphyry, jasper and epidote, while the floor was of a curious mosaic pavement, surrounded by a tessellated border of great beauty. Comfortable divans were placed by some of the columns, and upon one side was a marble table, or altar, upon which were various kinds of refreshments.

“Here thou wilt be safe,” said Bellerus, “and here thou wilt remain until I see thee again. Ere long a brother will wait upon thee, and assist thee as thou mayest need. All that is strange shall be explained upon some fitting opportunity. At present thou canst find relief in the thought that thou art safe. I must now hasten away, for Ianthe must not be in danger.”

“Aye, go to her at once,” replied Alaric. “I shall trust myself here with perfect confidence.”

“Then fare thee well, fare thee well for the present. Thou wilt not be long alone.”

And with this, Bellerus turned away and left the apartment. He opened and closed many doors, and passed through many strange places ; and he met armed men at certain points, but a simple word and sign

served him for a passport. Finally, he gained the street in the rear of the temple, and at once hurried on towards his house. He reached it, and found the door of the vestibule open. He entered, and called Ianthé, but he received no answer. He procured a light, and hastened to the maiden's apartments, but she was not there. Thus he went all over the house, and he knew that he was alone beneath the roof.

"My God!" he cried, sinking down upon a stool, and covering his face with his hands, "if she has fallen into the hands of the king, woe is me! And if he reads the story, which I fear her features too plainly tell, woe is to us all!"

The old man fairly staggered as he arose to his feet, so great was the weight of fear and terror which had come upon him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE KING HAS A STARTLING REVELATION.

When Ianthé was left alone she barred the door, and returned to the apartment where she had met her lover. At first she was under no apprehension, but as she sat there alone, in the depth of the night, strange thoughts came to her mind, and unpleasant phantoms began to flit before her imagination. Love is a powerful agent towards giving to the soul unrest. It quickens all the emotions, and, if fears have been lurking in hidden places, its penetrating beams will most surely drive them out, either to dispose of them forever, or to give them new power and strength. The maiden had long

known that there was some mystery connected with, and enveloping, her life-story. She knew that Bellerus had some potent reason for keeping her secluded, and that it was all for her own welfare. She had often pondered upon the subject, and as often given it up, and given it up, too, without vexation; for she was assured that nothing was hidden from her that could benefit her in the knowing of it. But now she wished she knew more. The danger which threatened Alaric might have some mystic relation to herself—she felt sure of it—she had heard enough so satisfy her on that point. And so, as her heart had been raised to bright hopes by the beaming of the renewed and quickened love upon it, did it sink, as she sat alone in the dreary midnight, and dwelt upon the unseen dangers that hovered about her.

The minutes passed away—she watched the hour-glass and the sands were running down swiftly—and yet she was alone. A dark spell was upon her—a spell of doubt and gloom—which had come unbidden, and which she could not drive off. She tried to think of Alaric as safe, and that he would soon take her away to a peaceful, happy home of his own, but with every forced thought the phantom would come in, and when she might have felt a joy in the calling up of a picture such as Hope would paint in the future, the emotion grew faint at its birth, and the unwelcome fear came instead.

And had she not cause for fear? Had not her father, Bellerus, taught her that it was not safe for her to mingle in society, as other maidens of her age did? Had he not always been fearful of her himself, and even trembled with apprehension upon the most trivial occasions? Had he not always shaken his head mysteriously when she would ask him why he feared thus, and simply answered that he could not tell? And had he not always, when forced to speak of her marriage, treated

the subject as though something more than life or death might hang upon it? He had done all this, and he had done more. He had vaguely shadowed forth the idea that in her very birth a life of danger and trouble became her inheritance.

And so the fear-phantoms gathered about her. Darkly they settled down upon her soul, till the last ray of light was shut out, and the last hope fainted away.

At length there came the sound of heavy feet echoing through the house, and Ianthe started up from her seat. Presently a loud knock was given upon the door, and she went into the vestibule.

"Who is there!" she asked, hoping that it might be her father, but yet dreading to hear the answer.

"The royal guard!" was the response. "Open the door and admit us!"

"But my father will return very soon, and then he will admit you."

"A plague upon thy father! We come in the king's name, and demand immediate entrance to this house!"

"But in a few moments he will come."

"And in a few moments we will pull these old walls down about thine ears. By the sacred altar of Diana, thou hadst better open quickly!"

"What seek ye?" asked the maiden, trembling at every joint.

"We seek to search the house. But we want no more words. Open, or we break our way in, and then the worse fate may be thine!"

A thundering blow upon the door with what appeared to be a large stone, brought Ianthe to a decision. She saw that they would quickly force their way in, so she removed the bar, and gave them entrance, and, as they came in, she retreated to the inner apartment, whither

she was quickly followed by four stout soldiers, one of them being an officer of low degree."

"Are you alone in the house?" asked the leader of the party, after he had cast his eyes about the place.

"I am," replied Ianthe.

"Has not a youth named Alaric been here?"

The maiden hesitated, but she remembered the words of her father and answered :

"He has been here, but is now gone."

"Ha ! and whither went he ?"

"I do not know."

"Lie not to us !"

"I tell thee, I know not."

"How long since he went ?"

"Not many minutes—not half an hour."

"And he will return here ?"

"No. He fled from here because he knew there would be danger here."

"By the tongue of Echo, but thou art seeming honest in thy speech," said the officer gazing into her face.

"I tell the truth, sir."

"'Twould be a pity if such marvelous beauty as thine were tainted by falsehood. But we'll search the house, nevertheless."

Another lamp was procured, and while one of the soldiers was left to keep watch upon the maiden, the other three started off to look over the dwelling. They ransacked every hole and corner they could find, but met with nothing to reward them for their trouble, and finally they returned to the apartment where they had left their companion.

"We can do no more," said the leader. "We must take the girl along, and let the lieutenant do the rest."

"But you will not take me," cried Ianthe, in alarm.

"We must, beauty, so don't fret about it."

The maiden plead and prayed, but all to no purpose. The soldiers had come with their orders, and they knew nothing beyond them. She might as well have urged reason upon the tempest. When she found that she must go, she procured a light silken mantle, which she threw over her head, and then informed the men that she was ready. The lights were extinguished, and the officer then led the way from the house, taking the fair prisoner under his own charge.

If Ianthe had been oppressed with fear before, she was much more oppressed now, for the phantoms began to take more tangible shape. The thought of seeing the king filled her with terror, though she could give to herself no clear reason why it should be so. She only knew that she had always held a deep dread of the monarch, and that Bellerus had never sought to divest her of it, but that he had rather helped her to retain the emotion. However, she could not now turn aside from her fate, and she strove to compose herself so that no perturbation of her own should work against her.

The officer was as respectful as one so rough and hardened could be, and Ianthe was conducted along through the still, dark, deserted streets in silence, till they reached the royal palace.

The king had not yet retired. He and his chamberlain had been conversing upon the events of the past and the present, and a fear of gigantic proportions had entered their minds, though they hoped, by summary proceedings, to meet whatever danger might come, and put it successfully down. Yet they could not sleep until they had heard from the escaped prisoner, for upon him rested a wondrous degree of importance.

Pyrrho was leaning back in his seat, with his eyes closed, when a page entered and informed him that a

party of soldiers had returned from their mission, and that their leader desired admittance.

"Is it Fingal?" demanded the king, starting up

"No, sire. It is an under officer."

"Admit him."

The page withdrew, and presently the soldier came in.

"How now, guardsman—what news bring ye?"

"I, in company with three others, have been to the house of Bellerus, the craftsman, but we found not the prisoner there, nor any male inhabitant."

"And where is my lieutenant?"

"He went in another direction, sire. He thought it very probable that the prisoner, even if he had been at Bellerus' house, would not remain there, so he sent us on, while he, with three of his best men, took another route, by which he hoped he might cut the fugitive off if he were attempting to escape towards the gate of the temple."

"It was a good thought. And you have not seen him since?"

"No, sire. But I found a maiden at the house of Bellerus—she was the sole occupant—and I have brought her with me."

"Ha! Is she beautiful?" cried Pyrrho.

"The most beautiful female I ever saw," answered the soldier with enthusiasm.

"Then we have the lady of Alaric's love. Bring her hither at once."

The man withdrew, and the monarch turned to his chamberlain.

"Now, Donatus, we shall see this rare flower which the old craftsman has kept hidden so long, and if there be any mystery about her, we will have it solved."

"I cannot imagine what mystery there can be," returned the chamberlain. "But—here she comes."

At that moment Ianthe was led into the room, and she stood before the monarch with her head bowed, and the light mantle shading her face. Pyrrho gazed with eager admiration upon the faultless form, and he watched her motions with the eye of one who had some judgment upon the external points of female beauty.

"What is thy name?" he asked, as she stopped before him.

"Ianthe," she answered, in a low, tremulous voice, but not more tremulous than might have been the voice of any maiden who found herself for the first time in the presence of royalty.

"Art thou the daughter of Bellerus?"

"I am, sire."

"And thou knowest the youth, Alaric?"

"I do, sire."

"And dost know where he is now?"

"I do not."

"Beware, maiden. We have means of knowing the truth."

"I have spoken only the truth, sire."

"Where is thy father?"

"I know not."

"Sire," spoke the officer who had brought her, "she confessed to me that her father had gone away with this Alaric."

"Ha! Is this so, maiden?"

"It is."

"And yet thou saidst thou had no knowledge of where Alaric might be."

"Nor have I, sire. Whither they went I know not. They would neither allow me to accompany them, nor to know their destination."

“Show me thy face, and let me judge whether thou speakest the truth.”

Ianthe raised her head, and as the mantle fell back, the beams from one of the clusters of lamps shone upon her. The king gazed into her beautiful features, and an exclamation of surprise broke from his lips ; but his admiration of her loveliness was quickly overcome by another emotion. As he continued to gaze a sudden start was perceptible in his frame ; and, after a moment of seeming doubt, he turned pale as death.

“Didst say thou wert the craftsman’s daughter ?” he whispered, as though the questions were forced involuntarily from him.

“I said so,” replied the maiden, trembling as she spoke.

At this point Donatus, who had seen the strange perturbation of his master, ordered the soldier to retire ; and then he moved to where he could gain a fair view of Ianthe’s features. He looked upon them, and in a moment he, too, became moved by an unaccountable tremor. The king composed himself as quickly as he could, and then touched a silken rope that hung near him, upon which a black eunuch entered the apartment.

“Mestor,” said the monarch, addressing the sable attendant, who was a gigantic fellow, “take this maiden to the women’s quarters, and be thou answerable for her safety with thy life.” Then, turning to Ianthe, he added :

“Until I can see thy father I shall detain thee here ; but fear not, for thou shalt be well cared for.”

“Sire,” cried the frightened girl, as the gigantic eunuch approached her, “I have done no wrong ! Oh, let me return to my home !”

“It may not be, lady. But I have assured thee that thou shalt be set free as soon as I have seen thy father.”

"And will you do no harm to him? Oh, king, he has meant no evil."

"I will not harm a hair of his head. Let this assurance give thee comfort."

While speaking, Pyrrho had beckoned to Mestor, and as the latter approached him he whispered:

"No living soul is to see her until I see thee again!" Then he added, in a louder key: "Conduct her to an apartment fitting the guest of a king."

Ianthe shrank away with a fearful shudder as the black approached her, for she saw that he was of stern aspect, and of terrible look; but she dared not resist, nor would she make another appeal to the king, so she suffered herself to be led from the apartment.

"Now by the gods!" cried the king, leaping down from his throne, and striding across the floor, "I see the solution of this volcanic problem. Donatus, didst see her face?"

"Aye, sire."

"And did you ever see one like it before?"

"Yes—most assuredly."

"Years ago?"

"Yes."

"And did you think the lion had left a whelp behind?"

"I have always mistrusted that such might be the case, sire."

"Then why have you not told me so?"

"Because I was not sure, and I would not burden thee with needless alarm. But I am sure now. Were Jupiter himself to tell me this maiden was the child of that man, I should feel no more sure than I do now."

"Nor should I," responded the king. "I knew her the moment I gazed into her face. Aha! I was safe enough in promising that her *father* should not be.

injured. But we can see something of the danger which has been over us. Ye gods ! it is surpassing strange that she could have been kept so long in our city, and yet kept so safely. That Bellerus is a shrewd fellow. But, thank the kind powers that sustain me, we have her safe enough now."

Pyrrho took another turn across the room, and then added, with a sudden clap of the hands :

"Can you realize all the importance of this occurrence?"

"What mean you, sire?"

"I mean, do you fully comprehend what a wondrous fortune has befallen us in the finding of this maiden?"

"Aye, most surely I do, sire. Of course you will keep her close, now that she is in your power."

"Keep her close ! By the scepter of Sicily, I think I will ! She shall not live to see another sun ! I should feel my throne on a foundation of quicksand while she lived."

"Sire," spoke the chamberlain, after a few moments' reflection, "perhaps, upon consideration, thou mightst find another fate for her."

"Ha !"

"Do you not think so, sire?"

"Speak plainly."

"Make her thine ! Give to her all thou fearest others might claim for her, and yet keep thy scepter."

"By the life within me, Donatus, but thou dost give me a new thought. I'll think of that. Ha ! who comes here?"

It was Hippon, entering in haste.

"Sire," he cried, "the very Fates and Furies are sent down upon Syracuse !"

"What is it, Hippon ? Out with it. We are prepared for wondrous things now."

"Thy lieutenant, Fingal, with three of his best men is slain!"

"How? Where?"

"At the entrance of the street of Diana's fountain."

"And the three men slain, too?"

"Yes, sire."

"All dead?"

"Yes."

"And who has done it?"

"Must it not have been Alaric?"

"Now, by the o'ertopping heavens!" exclaimed the monarch clasping his hands together, and starting across the floor, "this is exceeding all belief! Nothing has been found of the youth?"

"No, sire."

"And thus must a king submit! But it shall not be for long! Hippon, send my captain hither."

In a few moments the captain made his appearance.

"Claudian," spoke the monarch, "upon thy life I charge thee, bring me that youth Alaric. Thou hast men enough to cover the city; and thou shouldst have wit enough to find anything that breathes upon the island. Go find him, and bring him to me, dead or alive. All power is thine. Now go."

When the captain was gone the monarch turned to his chamberlain.

"One bird is caged. Let Claudian capture another. And now for this craftsman, Bellerus. I'll have him in a way of my own. Breathe not a word of the suspicion we hold against him."



CHAPTER VIII.

THE TYRANT'S VAULT.

On the morning following the events last recorded, the king rose from a unrefreshing slumber, and called his captain to him in his closet. Claudian had not yet slept, but had been at work without ceasing. Pyrrho wished to know how the matter stood concerning the youth, Alaric.

“I have satisfied myself upon two points,” said the captain, in his report, “First—Alaric has not left the city ; of this I am sure. He is within our walls somewhere. Second—His presence is not known in any quarter. I think the old artisan, Bellerus, and perhaps one or two of his immediate companions, alone know that he has been in Sicily since he fled, eight years ago. I have placed four hundred soldiers upon the watch. Every avenue in the city is under strict oversight, and he cannot make his appearance in a public street without being immediately recognized ; for I have caused my men to be so arranged that each one is placed in that quarter where he knows all the inhabitants ; so that a stranger, no matter of what degree, will be at once marked and overhauled. Thus no amount of disguise can save him from the Arguses I have set upon the watch, if he venture forth.”

"So far so good," returned the king, thoughtfully. "But have you set any guard upon the passes without the city?"

"No, sire. I had not thought it necessary."

"If you deem that any precaution within your power is unnecessary, then you do not comprehend the full risk we have at stake. Let every road and path and hedge upon the coast and towards the mountains be also guarded. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sire."

"For," pursued the king, "there is no knowing what may happen. You feel sure that the fugitive cannot leave the city. Suppose I had told you that he could have left my dungeon, all unarmed, while three bold executioners stood before him with drawn swords in their powerful grasps, you would have smiled at my folly. Yet he did it. And see how he has met stout Fingal and his stalwart men. I tell thee every possible thing must be done. Thou wilt see that trusty men are sent off without the city at once."

"Yes, sire."

"And now, captain, I wish to ask thee concerning one other matter: I have heard that in Egypt, in Athens, and in Jerusalem of Judea, there are certain craftsmen who are bound to each other by mystic ties. They are mostly the workmen in various departments of architecture, but artisans, and cunning artificers of all degrees, are eligible to the fraternity. Hast ever heard of such a thing?"

"Yes, sire."

"And have you ever heard the object of such an organization?"

"Aye! I have been told that it was for the purpose of preserving their art, and saving to themselves the

advantages of their discoveries and improvements ; and also for mutual relief and protection."

"And do you imagine that such a mystic fraternity has an existence in our city?"

Claudian was startled by the question.

"It may have," he said.

"Have you ever noticed anything that could lead your suspicions in that direction?"

"Nothing, sire. I only judge from reason. Many of the leading architects of our city are from far-off countries, and many of those who are native here have travelled in the East ; so that it would not be strange if they had brought hither with them the mysteries of which you speak."

"Keep your eyes open, Claudian, and if we can find such a thing it shall be rooted out at once. And now I bid you attend well to the business I have given to your charge."

The captain bowed and withdrew, and the king then sent for one of his messengers, who soon made his appearance.

"Do you know where the mason called Bellerus lives?" the monarch asked.

"Yes, sire."

"Then go to him, and bid him come hither. Say to him that the king would see him on a matter of business connected with the craft."

The messenger went away, and found the old artisan alone in his house. He gave to him the royal message, and without hesitation Bellerus arose to obey. He seemed to be laboring under some weighty affair of the mind, but there was a stern resolution apparent in his movements. He accompanied the messenger to the palace, and was at once admitted to the royal presence.

Pyrrho gazed sharply into the bronzed features of the

craftsman, and turning to his chamberlain, he remarked in an undertone :

“There’s bold, hard stuff in that fellow.”

“Aye, sire, and there be many more like him in our city.”

“Thy name is Bellerus ?” returned the king, turning to his visitor.

“It is, sire.”

“And thou art master of thy craft ?”

“I am an experienced mason.”

“So I have heard ; and I have sent for thee to have thee perform for me a piece of work in thy line. Canst thou do it ?”

“First, sire,” returned Bellerus, with a slight twitching of the muscles of his face, “I would ask thee if my child, Ianthe, is in this palace ?”

“She is, good Bellerus ; and she is perfectly safe,” answered the king, with great seeming frankness. “I sent my guard last night after a prisoner who had escaped, and hearing that he had been at thy house, thither I sent. But he was not found there, and the maiden was alone. She said that the prisoner had been there, so my officer took the liberty to bring her away that I might question her. I should have sent her back to her home this morning, but I had determined to employ thee in the work of which I have spoken, so I thought she would be better here until you were ready to return home with her. She shall have every attention and comfort.”

“Do you mean that I shall remain here until my work is finished ?” the mason asked.

“Yes. I wish it done as soon as possible. I will show it to you, and then you can employ such help as you may judge you will need.”

"If I remain here until the work is finished I may see my child during the intervals of refreshment?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will perform the task if I can."

The king bade the old craftsman to follow him ; and then he led the way out from the throne-room, through a winding passage—then through several smaller apartments, to his private bath. Beyond here was a closet, which seemed to be in an angle of the structure, and within the base of one of the high towers. The ceiling was arched, and elaborately sculptured ; the walls were of cinnamon-stone, very highly polished ; and the floor was a fine Mosaic pavement, with the representation of a chariot-race cleverly wrought out by the proper arrangement of the various colored bits of stone. But this floor was not whole. Near the centre was an aperture, some ten feet in diameter, which presented to the eye a seemingly bottomless pit. There was no finish about the edge, save a skirting of marble, flush with the floor ; but the brink was abrupt, and only guarded by a few boards which had been thrown across.

"What think ye this hole was made for?" asked the king.

Bellerus gazed down into the broad pit, but he could only see a fathomless depth of gloom.

"I have no means of knowing," he answered. "This part of the palace is much older than the other parts, and this wall was probably constructed when the high tower was built. I could judge better by examining the interior, and sounding its depths."

"And how can ye do that?"

"When I have my men here I can do it easily."

"Well," pursued the king, walking around the vault, and gazing into its darkness, "I have taken an odd fancy. You know my bath is close by?"

"Yes."

"And I have thought to have this pit so tightened with firm, flinty cement, that it will hold water ; and then I will have it filled for the use of my bath."

"But, sire, it would require a river to fill it to overflowing."

"I suppose there are men enough in Sicily to fill it, and keep it full?"

"Yes."

"Then it shall be done. The king does not stop before any obstacle which can be surmounted. How many men will you want?"

"I cannot tell, sire, for I know not yet the amount of work which must be done."

"But you can ascertain?"

"With the assistance of some of my fellows."

"Give me their names, and I will send for them."

Bellerus hesitated awhile, but finally he called over the names of four men who should be summoned. They were accordingly sent for, and when they arrived arrangements were at once made for sounding the depth of the vault, the king standing by to watch the operation. A heavy plummet was attached to the end of a long line, and lowered into the pit. Down, down, down it went, and when it had reached the bottom there was found to have been let out a hundred and fifty cubits.

"It is an enormous depth," remarked one of the masons.

"A wondrous depth," responded the king. "And now I should like to know how it is constructed. Cannot one of you go down?"

Bellerus quickly made arrangements for exploring the cryptic place. A lighted torch was first sent down, and when it had descended to a considerable distance

there was a loud report—a concussion—as though an earthquake had broken beneath the palace. The king was sore afraid ; but when he saw that the craftsmen took the occurrence as a matter of course, he became calm. After this the torch was sent down again, and finally it went to the bottom burning, and as the workmen gazed down, it looked like a ghastly eye, or dim spark, in the far-off darkness. It reflected upon nothing, and revealed nothing.

Next Bellerus suffered himself to be lowered into the vault by his fellows, and as he descended he found that the space grew larger, until its diameter was not far from twenty cubits. He could see that the walls were of solid masonry, and he had no doubt, in his own mind, that the dismal place has been originally built for a dungeon—built by some king, or lord, who found this a convenient way in which to send those whom he wished to dispose of forever. It was a long, long way to the bottom, and when he reached it he found it covered by a thick, slimy mud. When he cried out his voice was only as a dim echo ; and when he gazed aloft he could distinguish a small speck of dull light. But he knew that no human voice could reach to that place from where he stood, and that even a clap of thunder might not stir the air to such a height. He went around with his torch and examined the walls, and he found them all firm and solid, the massive rocks, all hewn and squared, being laid in a cement, which had become a part of the very stone to which it had adhered. No mortal power could move these stones—nor could mortal power, unaided from above, carve a way up from out that Tartarian depth.

When Bellerus returned he reported what he had found, and the king could not hide the demoniac satisfaction that he felt at heart.

"Then it will need but little work done upon the inside?" he said.

"I have not fully examined the wall on the way up," returned the artisan.

"But the bottom is firm?"

"As firm as the base of Olympus."

"Then that will answer."

"But if there be defects on the way up, the place will not hold water," suggested the craftsman.

"True," returned Pyrrho. "I had forgotten that. You shall look to it, and have all prepared. And then can you fit a marble covering to this aperture, which I can rise and fall at pleasure?"

"Yes, sire. Give us the materials, and we will fix it as you wish."

The party then left the closet, and, by order of the king, apartments were furnished for the craftsmen in the palace, and the officers of the guard had strict orders to see that they did not leave the building.

As soon as possible the materials were carried to the tower-closet, and Bellerus and his four fellows went at work. They rigged swinging seats, which could be lowered from the top, for examining the walls of the vault; and from the marble which was furnished they fashioned a covering for the mouth, and hung it so nicely that one man could easily swing it up or down. It hung by two pivots in the center, and even a pressure of the foot would move it. When it was nearly completed the king came to see it.

"We shall finish it to-morrow morning," said Bellerus; "and when it is done you will have a reservoir which will hold water enough for all the fountains in Syracuse."

"I mean to have the most extensive bath in the world," cried the monarch.

When the day's work was done the old craftsman was permitted to go and see Ianthe, whom he found in a small, plainly furnished apartment, at one end of a dark corridor. He had seen her once before, and she had been quite contented after she knew that he was at work in the palace.

"We must not speak too loudly," said Bellerus in a low tone ; "for a guard is placed over us."

"A guard !" repeated the maiden in surprise.

"Yes. A huge black eunuch is not far off. I have my eyes about me, and can see. However, we can talk without fear, if we are careful."

"But why are you so despondent in your tone?" the maiden asked, gazing anxiously into his face.

"I am not despondent, Ianthe."

"Yes, you are. Your voice and look are both sad and portentous."

"Well, well, it may be a spell that has come over me. But let me say what I have to say. Our work will be finished to-morrow."

"And then we will go to our home," cried Ianthe, hopefully.

"I may go, but—"

"But what? Ah, father, I see that you are sad. You have some fear—some fear for me. Is it not so? Speak."

The old man gazed into the beautiful face beside him, and finally he said :

"I have reason to believe that you will not be suffered to depart when I go ; but you must not fear for the result. I have more power than the monarch dreams of, and I will surely see that you are not harmed."

"But," cried the frightened girl, "if you are outside of the palace, and I am inside, how can you help me?"

“By a power I cannot explain to you. Suffice it for me to assure you that I can help you. If you do not see me again here, be not alarmed. The king thinks that I mistrust him not, but I can read his thoughts easily. I tell thee plainly, he does not mean that I shall see thee again; but I have friends in the palace. Keep up a good heart, let come what will.”

“And why is all this?” murmured the maiden, in a prayerful tone, taking one of the old man’s hands in her own, and gazing up into his face. “Thou art not my father by blood.”

“Thou knowest I am not, for I have so told thee.”

“Then who am I?”

“All that thou seest thyself. I cannot tell thee more.”

“But I only seek to know why the king should so treat me.”

“If I give thee promise of safety from his power, why should that trouble thee?”

“O, but I cannot feel the assurance of that safety. Suppose he should put thee to death?”

“He cannot. As soon as my work is done, I shall slip away from the palace. I shall not dare to remain. But thou shall be cared for.”

In vain was it that Ianthe strove to gain some further knowledge of the strange circumstances of the past which were hidden from her, and which yet held so much influence in the present, beside casting dark shadows into the future. Bellerus would not speak, for he said he could not. His tongue was tied.

At length the old man arose to take his leave. He held the sweet girl by the hands, and spoke hopefully yet solemnly :

“Ianthe, in all that is to come be sustained by the assurance that it is the will of the gods. Aye, it is the

will of a God whom this people know not. It is the will of the One Almighty—the great I AM ! Thou canst not escape thy fate. Did it lay in the power of man to release thee from the ordeal through which thou must pass, I would have removed thee from danger ere this. But be brave and hopeful, and in the end a crown of joy and peace shall be thine. And once more I tell thee thou hast many friends beside me. Shouldst thou never behold me more they would serve you all the same. So Ianthe—my child, my beloved—look to thy crown of joy in the future, and bear all in the present with fortitude.”

He kissed her, and overpowered by the wondrous emotions that came overwhelming upon her, she sank down and covered her face with her hands. But soon she started up again and called the name of Bellerus. No answer. She was alone. She called again ; the door was opened and the eunuch appeared. She gazed for an instant in his horrible face, and then shrank away in terror, and buried her face in the soft cushion of her couch.

CHAPTER IX.

WITHIN THE VAULT—AND UPON ITS BRINK.

Early in the morning, before the craftsmen were astir, the monarch called his chamberlain, and they repaired to the closet where the work had been going on. The broad marble cover was up, and they looked down into the vault.

“What think you of it?” asked Pyrrho.

“Horrible !” whispered Donatus, shuddering as he

gazed down into the Plutonian darkness, and felt the damp, chill air coming up.

"It is so deep," pursued the king, "that no sound could reach us from the bottom. Were there at this moment a hundred men down there, their united voices could not be made palpable to our ears. Is it not a strange place?"

"Indeed it is, sire."

"And it will be a wondrous place for keeping secrets, Donatus."

The chamberlain, hardened as he was, could not keep back the shudder which crept over him at the thought thus suggested—the thought of consigning a human being to such a place.

"It will not be a lingering death—not very," exclaimed the king; "for, upon clearing away some of the collected dirt upon the inner wall drops of water started in, and ere long there will be enough to drown a man in there."

"It will be a sure death," said Donatus, speaking more freely as he became habituated to the idea.

"All the power and cunning of earth could not get a man up from that dark depth when he was once there! I tell thee, Donatus, it is a wondrous thing. And see how I have had it fixed."

Thus speaking, the monarch took hold of that part of the marble covering which swung up from the aperture, and, with a single effort, he threw it into place! and when it was done the floor of the closet seemed unbroken; the centre-piece of marble looking not in the least out of character or harmony from being surrounded by the mosaic pavement.

"Now observe," pursued Pyrrho. "We can make this closet as dark as we please, and the moment a man is led upon yonder edge of this marble down he must go.

The craftsmen have only to fix the braxen pins in their places, by which this covering can be held firm when I so wish, and then all will be done. When they are fitted I can so arrange them that I can hold the trap in its place with my foot, and let it go when I please. You, Donatus, are the only living being to whom I shall communicate this secret ; and thus I shall hold complete power over the lives of those about me, even while they know it not. Thou wilt not breathe it ?”

“Never, sire. But the workmen who have fashioned this trap ?”

“Dost think they have not made their work strong enough to hold themselves? Ha, ha ! Bellerus has planned for escaping as soon as this is done. I overheard somewhat of their conversation, and I know their intent. The old artisan did not think I was near, and he let the whole plot out. They have contrived to learn the way to the court by the lower private corridor, and they have also obtained false keys to some of my doors ; and thus they mean to leave me as soon as possible. Oho ! I heard their whole plan ; 'twas a good one ! and they look for help, if need be, from some one within the palace ! But I've a plan of my own, one I have had from the first, and I'll give them a taste of the quality of a king's ingenuity. And to this end I want your assistance. Hence I have called you thus early that we might have a perfect understanding.”

The chamberlain was ready to listen, and the plan was soon contrived, after which they withdrew to attend to other matters.

In due time Bellerus and his companions entered the closet and resumed their work, and by the middle of the afternoon it was all complete, though they had as yet made no report to that effect, nor did they intend to until it suited their convenience. But the king entered,

however, while they were consulting, and he saw at once that they had no more to do, though he pretended not to notice it.

"Will you have it all finished to-night, good Bellerus?" he asked, in a most friendly and condescending manner.

"We shall try, sire," was the answer of the old artisan while he cast a meaning glance upon his comrades.

"Very well," resumed Pyrrho, advancing to the brink and gazing over, "you may take your own time. But I must be very busy during the remainder of the evening, and I have come to satisfy myself upon one point. I think you said that water was oozing in from near the top of the vault."

"Yes, sire, probably from the drainage of your bath."

"Have you been down to see how much has run in since yesterday?"

"No."

"I wish you would do so now, then. You have the staging all rigged?"

"It is all handy, sire."

"Then will you not go down and examine? You, with two of your men to hold the torches, can descend, while the other two, with myself, remain here to attend the ropes."

Without further remark Bellerus proceeded to arrange the swinging staging, and when it had been suspended over the edge of the vault, he called upon two of his men to come with him. They obeyed, and when they had taken their places they were carefully lowered, the rope being wound up on an axle of small diameter, to which was attached a wheel so large that one man could easily manage the weight of half-a-dozen suspended by the rope.

Down went the old craftsman and his two companions

—slowly and steadily—down—down—and the king watched the unwinding rope with a nervous gaze.

“Hark !” he said, at the same time clapping his hands.

“Did not Bellerus call to you ?”

The two men at the wheel stopped and listened.

“Here, let me hold this where it is, and do you look down and ascertain what he wants.”

The monarch caught the wheel as he spoke, and the two artisans advanced to the edge of the vault and looked over. At that moment the chamberlain, who had recognized the signal agreed upon, glided into the apartment without noise. In a moment more Pyrrho had let the wheel go, and, with a sudden movement, he pushed the craftsman nearest to him over the fearful brink, while Donatus, who had been on the alert, served the second man in like manner. The royal assassin bent his ear over the dark pit to listen, but the swift revolving of the wheel overcame all other sound. In a short time, however, the rope had all run off, and with a blow of his sword the king cut it loose, and let it go, after which he bent his ear again over the brink of the fearful pit. But all was silent as the grave down there. Once he fancied he heard the shriek of a dying man, but it was not repeated. The damp, deathly exhalation struggled up from the Tartarian abyss, but it bore with it no sound from those who had been consigned to the horrible prison.

“Now, Donatus,” spoke the monarch, “the secret of this place, in its present use, rests with you and me alone. Let us guard our speech so that no other being shall know it and live.”

“I will be guarded,” replied the chamberlain, shaking over the horror which had crept in upon him. It was not a horror at seeing five men put to death ; but it was from the terrible gloom which clung to the place. It

seemed to bring him near to the infernal regions, and he almost imagined that he could hear the groans of Ixion and Sisyphus, and of the wretches who fled the fiery flames. In short, Donatus had never been a brave man. He was a ready tool, and an adroit courtier, and thus had gained and maintained his position.

“I can now dispose of those whom I fear without trusting to brazen bolts, or bungling executioners,” said Pyrrho, as he stepped back from the aperture. “Now help me move this wheel away, and we will then attend to other matters.”

The wheel was borne to an adjoining room, where a mass of rubbish was collected, and then the king returned and closed the mouth of his vault. The heavy marble swung over into its place without noise, and when the dread sepulchre was thus hidden, the tyrant and his minister left the spot. The latter repaired to the hall of audience to attend to the duties of his office in that quarter, while the former remained in an ante-room adjacent to the bath.

When the king was thus alone he began to pace nervously to and fro, ever and anon stopping, as some thought, more mighty than others, rested upon his mind.

“By the curse of Tantalus,” he muttered to himself, halting in the centre of the room, with his hands folded, and his eyes bent upon the floor, “I am in sore doubt upon this matter. The counsel of Donatus is good, providing the maiden is to be thus managed. But if she refuse, what then? I cannot feel safe to have her unwillingly with me. Her guardian is disposed of, and far better is it that she should follow him than that she should live to bring danger upon me.”

Thus speaking, he touched a bell-cord close at hand, and in a few moments a page made his appearance.

"Bid Mestor to come hither," was his order ; and ere long the eunuch made his appearance.

"Mestor," said the king, "how does the maiden appear?"

"Since the old craftsman left her last, sire, she has been sad."

"What makes her so?"

"I cannot tell. She was in fair spirits while he came and went ; but the cloud settled upon her last evening, and to-day she has found no comfort."

"Aye, I think I see," the king returned. "The old man must have told her his work would be finished to-day, and she thinks he will go away without her. You may bring her to me."

The eunuch bowed and withdrew, and Pyrrho appeared more nervous than before. He strode about the apartment for awhile and then stopped again, with his hands folded, and his head bowed, as before.

"The way is plain enough," he muttered. "I would like her for a wife, and were she else than what she is I'd have her if Pluto himself said nay ! But if she came not willingly to me she must take the other course ! If she passes quietly away from earth, all this trouble will be gone, and I shall breathe again. 'Tis easily done. 'Tis but a single motion—an effort of the will—a pressure of my foot—and she will be in the land of shadows ! Surely the sepulchre I will give her ought to warrant her passage over the dark and pestilential river."

At this point the door opened, and Mestor entered, leading Ianthe by the hand. Pyrrho motioned for the eunuch to depart, and then he turned towards the maiden, who stood before him with her hands folded upon her bosom, and her eyes bent upon the floor. She did seem sad and melancholy, but she was beautiful—

very beautiful. Her loveliness was almost celestial, and for the while the voluptuous monarch seemed transfixed by the presence.

“Lady,” he finally said, assuming a kindly tone. “I have sent for thee that I might speak with all plainness and fullness of heart, and I trust that thou wilt listen to me, and give me all thy confidence.”

She gazed up into the king’s face but her eyes quickly fell again, for she could not bear to look upon the features of one who had been so cruel, and whose hands were stained with so much blood. Ah ! had she known the deed that had last stained those hands ! but in mercy, she did not.

“I shall speak plainly,” pursued the king, “and you must have your thoughts ready. Suppose I were to offer you the crown of—QUEEN ?”

Ianthe started, and tottered back.

“Suppose I were to offer you a seat upon the throne of Sicily ?”

Again the maiden started, but this time the emotion was deeper and stronger.

“Will you not answer me ?”

“Sire,” she said, raising her eyes slowly to his face. “Thou canst not be serious in this.”

“I am serious, lady. I would make thee my queen. I speak in all seriousness, and after due deliberation. And I would have thee deliberate ere thou answerest.”

“Thou hast one queen already, sire.”

“I said I would make thee my queen,” the king answered, quickly. “If thou wilt accept the offer, thou shalt have the place, and nothing shall stand in thy way.”

“It cannot be,” the maiden said.

“But I tell thee it can be ! I know of what I speak.”

“Sire, if thou wouldst do me a kindness, let me go to my father. Send me back to the home from whence I was taken.”

“Thou art mistaken, lady, if thou thinkest I would do all this for thy sake alone. I love thee. Why dost thou start?”

“O! speak not so to me. Let me go.”

“Not until we have a better understanding. I tell thee again—I love thee, and would make thee queen. Now wilt thou not accept my offer?”

“I cannot.”

“Bethink thyself.”

“I have thought enough, sire. It cannot be.”

“I would not be harsh, fair lady, nor force thee to a conclusion; but I may say this much in all sincerity: If thou wilt be my queen, all shall be well with thee, but if thou refusest I may not have the power to save thee from a fearful fate.”

The maiden was frightened now, for the memory of old fears came to harass her, and she could not so well bear the new. She was very pale, and leaned against the marble wall for support.

“I would not threaten you,” continued Pyrrho, as he saw how deeply moved she was. “I only speak the truth. The fates have decreed that thou shalt be my queen.”

“No, no, no!” cried Ianthe, struggling with the deadly fear that was upon her, and in a measure overcoming it. “The fates have not so decreed.”

“But I tell thee they have.”

Again the maiden struggled with the fear-spirit, and gradually she overcame it—overcame it so far that she could control herself even in the presence of the base tyrant of Sicily.

“Sire,” she said, and she seemed very calm as she spoke, “I cannot be what you have proposed.”

“But suppose a worse fate were behind it?”

“There can be none worse on earth.”

“Ha! is that your mind?”

“It is.”

“And you dare to speak your hate?”

“I have not spoken of hate, sire. I have spoken with the thought of my own heart, of which I take counsel.”

The king strode across the apartment, and when he returned, he gazed upon the girl with a strange look. There was anger—there was fear—there was vengeance—and yet much of admiration, upon his countenance.

“Once more I ask thee—would nothing induce thee to share my throne?”

“Nothing!”

“Not even the fear of death?”

“Not even the fear of death,” replied Ianthe, firmly.

Again the monarch crossed the room, and when he returned this time he had assumed a look which those who knew him best would have dreaded.

“I meant not to threaten you,” he said, with a strange tremor in his tone, and a burning light in his eye. “I only wished to try you to the last, for I had hoped that you might consent. Yet I assure thee thou hadst much better accept mine offer.”

“I cannot,” was the maiden’s response.

“And such is thy final answer? No power can change thy mind?”

“Not while I live, and have the sense of reason.”

“Then I will not waste time with thee further.”

Ianthe started at the sound of the king’s voice, for it had greatly changed. She had not been so much moved by his look and tone of anger, for she had expected as

much ; but in this there was something dreadful—something that sounded doomful and final.

Pyrrho walked to the door, and opened it—not the door by which Ianthe had entered, but the one where he had come in—and then turned back.

“Come with me,” he said, “and I will conduct thee to the place where thy father is !”

“Wilt thou ? Wilt thou let me go with him ?”

“Thou shalt see how true a king can be to his word. I mean now to send thee direct to Bellerus’ arms. I can ill bear the thought of losing thee, but if thou wilt not be my queen, I can have no cause for keeping thee. So come with me. Shall I lead thee ?”

“No. I can walk alone.”

The distance was very short, only a step into the bath, then across, into a short passage, a slight turn, an opening door ; one more, and the tyrant stood within the closet where the fatal vault had been arranged. The maiden followed him ; followed him until she stood upon the very center of that part of the marble slab which flew downward when the spring was set free.

“Thou wilt not be my queen ?” the king asked in a hoarse whisper ; for even he was agitated at the thought of the dread fate which yawned beneath the lovely being.

“Oh ! I cannot. Carry me to my father !”

“Thou shalt be with him very quickly !”



CHAPTER X.

A MARTYR.

The foot of the king was upon the fatal spring, but he hesitated ere he pressed upon it. Never before had he seen such beauty, and should he thus throw the lovely jewel away? He gazed upon the maiden, and as he caught the soft light of her wondrous eyes, and saw the sweet lips half apart, as though exhaling the breath of roses, as he saw her neck of alabaster whiteness, and her bosom like the breasts of swans that were twins, his mind wavered. He would possess her charms, but should he accept the risk?

What might have been the result, had he been left to himself, it is impossible to say, for while he thus hesitated, the door of the closet was thrown unceremoniously open, and the chamberlain entered. He started back as he saw the maiden standing upon that fatal spot, and an exclamation of alarm broke from his lips.

“How, now?” cried the king, in an angry tone. “What do you here unbidden?”

“Pardon, sire. It is a matter of necessity, and I thought to find thee alone.”

Ianthe stepped aside as the chamberlain spoke, but he was careful not to take her place. He walked around the marble covering, and whispered to the king that he should send the maiden away. They repaired to

another apartment, where Mestor was summoned, and when he made his appearance, Ianthe was once more placed under his charge.

"But my father, sire," she cried, as the eunuch was about to lead her away. "You promised to take me to him."

"And so I meant, but business of moment now claims my attention. However, thou shalt be well cared for. Go with Mestor now, and we will of thy father anon."

Without further command the slave led Ianthe from the apartment, and when they were gone, the king turned upon his chamberlain.

"By the Furies, Donatus, thou hast taken great liberty with me."

"How so, sire?"

"In coming upon me as thou didst in that place."

"And did you mean to consign the lady Ianthe to that vault, sire?"

"Most surely I did."

"Then I am glad I came, and though I sought thee for another purpose, yet would I have sought thee for that alone, had I been forewarned of thy intent."

"Ha! thou speakest as one who has assurance. By the powers, Donatus, I might not well brook thy interference."

"And yet I must speak, sire," replied the chamberlain, throwing off all fear, and assuming that appearance of solicitude for his royal master which he knew so well how to put on.

"Speak on," said Pyrrho. "I am ready to listen, and then govern myself as I please."

"Most surely that is thy privilege, sire. But I will speak my mind. If thou hadst taken the maiden's life, the consequences would have been greater in disaster than thou hadst imagined. We cannot judge how many

in Syracuse may know the secret of her life. I do not think that secret has rested alone with Bellerus."

"Well, what of that?" demanded the king impatiently.

"Much, sire. Should she be missed she would be traced hither, and if she was not found the people would soon know that she had been slain in the palace. I tell thee, Pyrrho, we have not the power to stand up under such a shock as would fall upon us."

"But how can she be traced hither? She was alone in the house whence she was taken, and no one met her on her way."

"Aye, sire, you should know how such things leak out. It will be known fast enough."

"But, Donatus, we are not fully sure that she is what we suspected."

"I am as sure of it as that I live. I tell thee, sire, I know it. So let us consider that point settled."

"And what would ye have me do?"

"The way is plain enough for your majesty. You must make her your wife. Let her once occupy that station, and you have nothing to fear from the quarter whence come the threatenings we most dread."

"But she declares that she will never be such."

"I expected she would, for 'tis evident that she loves the youth Alaric. But shall the king stop at the whim of a girl? Have you not in the palace appliances that might bend her to your will? I say, sire, she must be your queen."

"By the sacred temple, but thou dost talk most directly, Donatus."

"And thou must do it, sire."

"But might not an unwilling queen do me more harm than good? Suppose she should claim the sympathy of her people in her forced condition?"

"By the crown of Pluto, sire, I think, if I were king, I'd dwell lightly upon such a risk. Have you not the power? Can you not make her understand that her very life is in your hands, and that it hangs upon her obedience? Let not that thought give you trouble. Will you not think of this?"

"I will. I have thought of it while you have been speaking, and I have almost resolved that she shall be my queen."

"Right, sire."

"And I shall think further upon it. But enough of this for the present. Now tell me what called you to my presence so unexpectedly."

"Your captain has a message for you. He came to the audience-chamber, and said he had something of importance to communicate."

"We will seek him, then."

"But, sire, thou hast pardoned me for interrupting thee?"

"Yes, Donatus. And on the whole, I am glad thou didst come."

When they reached the great chamber, they found the captain of the guard there, who seemed to have been waiting impatiently for the king.

"What is it, Claudian?" asked Pyrrho, taking a seat on his throne.

"I have come with intelligence, sire," the captain replied.

"Of what character is it?"

"Of an important one. Thou knowest my lieutenant, Leos?"

"Yes."

"He is of quick temper and can ill brook opposition from those who should obey, but he is an honest man, and one firmly attached to thy interest, sire."

"I know the man well, captain, and have more than once taken note of his proper attention to duty. But what of him?"

"I'll tell thee, sire. Thou knowest that Fingal and his men were slain in the street of the fountain, so I put upon the command in that section this same lieutenant, Leos, knowing that he was one of the most shrewd and brave of all our officers. I should prefer that he should relate to thee his own adventure, but I have come in advance to crave thy pardon for a grave error which he committed."

"If 'twas only an error, our pardon is granted in the outset. So let him be called in."

The captain withdrew, and shortly returned with his lieutenant, who was a middle-aged man, of stern aspect and powerful frame. He bowed before the king and then moved back a pace.

"What is this thou hast to tell?" the monarch asked, regarding the man eagerly.

"Sire," he replied, "I was placed in command over the guard set within three bow-shots of the Temple of Diana, and I was particularly informed of all the circumstances which had led to this extraordinary watch, so I saw the necessity of being on the alert, and allowing nothing to escape my notice.

"And thou didst very right, good Leos."

"Last night, sire, I saw men moving about the streets who could have no legitimate business in the quarters where they were, and I bade my men to watch them, but they were suffered to slip away without their errands being discovered. Towards midnight I saw four men cross the square of the fountain and those I followed myself. I had hung upon their steps until they had reached the street of Mars, and when I thought I had them most surely under my observance,

they slipped away from my sight, and I knew not whither they had gone. I made all possible haste to the point where I had last beheld them, but in no way could I account for their disappearance. An hour later, while I was again in the square and musing upon this occurrence, I saw these same four men emerge from one of the narrow streets. Two of my guard were with me, and we concealed ourselves so as to observe the men should they pass near us. They did come near, so near that I could see the outline of their faces and I felt sure that two of the party belonged within the palace of your majesty. I judged so more particularly from their garb, which I knew was the same as those worn by some of the serving-men in the lower department of this place. I thought it strange that servants of the king's household should be stealthily gliding about in such a quarter at such an hour, and I determined to arrest them. As they were very near I stepped out before them and ordered them to stop, but instead thereof they took to flight, and in spite of all our efforts, three of them escaped us. We succeeded in capturing one of them, but he was not one of those whom we had been most anxious to secure. He was an old man of three-score at least, of the name of Proteus, and was a cunning worker in various kinds of metals."

"I have heard of him," interrupted the king. "He is not a native here?"

"No, sire. He was from the east, from Palestine, I think."

"Go on with your account. I am interested."

"When we found that the other three had escaped us, we took this man to the guard-house, and there I questioned him. First, I asked him if he knew whither his companions had gone, and he said he did not. Then I asked him what he had been doing out so late, to which

he would give no direct answer. Then I asked who were the two serving-men of the royal palace that had been with him. At first he seemed inclined to deny that they were such, but when I made him understand that I was confident upon this point, he flatly refused to answer. I had been clothed by my commander with power sufficient to meet any emergency of this kind, and I determined to wring an answer from him, for I conceived it to be of the utmost importance that your majesty should know who had been out from the palace under such suspicious circumstances. I asked him again if he would give me the names of his companions, and again he refused. Then I told him I would take his life if he did not speak, and tell me who were the men from the palace that had been with him, and his answer was, that he would die before the answer should pass his lips.

“I must confess, sire, that I was deeply wroth at this. It galled me to have my authority thus set at naught, in the presence of my followers, by a simple craftsman, and I determined to put his endurance to the test. Once more I threatened him with death if he did not give me the names I asked for, and his refusal was even more peremptory than before. I ordered him to be stripped from the waist up, and then lashed to one of the pillars of the guard-house. When he was secured, with his arms turned behind him, and lashed around the pillar, I put the question to him again ; but he only answered me that he had spoken all he should speak upon that subject. Then I ordered one of my men to present a sharp spear to his naked left breast ; and when this had been done I assured him that the steel should be driven to his heart if he did not speak. He told me I might kill him if I pleased, but that no power of earth could force from him a secret which he had promised to keep.

This excited my curiosity and my suspicions still more, for I saw that the men from the palace had reason for not wishing to be known ; and, if the keeping of their secret was worth a human life, how much more importance might there not be for the king's knowing it ! The spear-head was pressed upon his bosom until the flesh was punctured, and the red blood started forth, and yet he would not speak.

“Sire, he died ! He died with the secret unspoken ; and to the last moment he was firm and unshaken. I could not help it. I did not think he would remain so stubborn. I believed that his fortitude would give way ere a vital spot was reached. I caught his head as it sank forward, and there was a whispered sentence upon his lips. I caught only the last word, and that was JEHOVAH !”

The king remained for some moments speechless with wonder. He gazed first upon his chamberlain, and then upon his captain. He seemed to care nothing for the deed of death the lieutenant had done—he only cursed the fate that had kept the victim's lips sealed.

“Donatus,” he finally said, “what thinkest thou of this ?”

“I think it most strange, sire, and startling.”

“I thought it so,” added the captain ; “and hence I was anxious that you should hear it as it was.”

“But there must be a deep cause behind all this,” pursued the king. “There must be an organization of more than ordinary moment. Leos, I am sorry thou didst take the fellow's life, for I would have questioned him myself ; but I cannot blame thee. We must find another, and we may be more successful. Only bear this one thing in mind, and have it communicated to all the officers of the guard : If another man is apprehended under like circumstances, let him be brought at once to

me. By the gods, I will question him with such appliances as shall make his tongue speak to some purpose."

"You shall be obeyed, sire," responded the captain.

Then the king asked Leos if he could give any description of the two men he had seen, and whom he took to be members of the royal household.

"I cannot describe them, sire," the lieutenant replied, "for it was quite dark, and I could not distinguish their features. But the impression was a vivid one. I knew their dress, and, in my own mind, I was sure. Thou knowest how a man may entertain a conviction as strong as absolute proof can make it, and yet be unable to substantiate it to another. But the prisoner, in fact, admitted that two of his companions were members of your majesty's household."

"This thing must be sifted to the very bottom," declared the monarch. "Perhaps, if you were to see all the inmates of the palace assembled you could distinguish the two men whom you observed?"

"I might, sire."

The king was too anxious upon the subject to allow an opportunity to escape him, and he at once gave orders for closing all the doors and gates, and having the servants mustered under their respective chiefs. When this had been done, he took the lieutenant with him, and passed before the assembled servitors. Every man had answered to his name, and Leos scanned every one; but among so many—where there were hundreds wearing the same dress as he had seen, and so many of the same size and general outline of form—it was impossible for him to approach a decision. He was puzzled and confessed that he could not even tell whom to suspect.

The most rigid inquiries were instituted, and no

information of importance could be gained ; and finally the king was forced to give up.

But he did not give up the determination to push this matter to the utmost extent of his power. There was a fearful plot somewhere, he felt sure of it, and he must fathom it by his own wit. He had never striven to make friends, so he had no strong friendships to flee to now. But he could depend somewhat upon those who were interested with him, and upon them alone could he call for counsel in this hour of need. He conferred long with Donatus, and it was finally agreed upon that every suspicious man should be brought at once to the palace, and consigned to the Tartarian vault beyond the private bath.

"It is the only safe course," said the monarch. "Bellerus is already disposed of ; we'll have Alaric soon ; and then others shall be sent to the valley of shadows as we find them."

"And Ianthe ?" suggested the chamberlain.

"By the couch of Venus, I have resolved to keep her !" cried Pyrrho, excitedly. "I have pondered well upon it, and I think such is the best course. Aha ! I'll have the most lovely maiden of all Sicily for my own, and I'll bend the influence she may wield to my own benefit. I may have a troublous time in taming her."

"Marry her first and then use the authority of a husband. The husband may accomplish more than the king."

"Right, Donatus. I'll try it."

"And your majesty fully pardons me for having interrupted you while you held the maiden over the fatal crypt ?"

"Aye ! from my heart, Donatus. She is a rare prize. She may minister to my safety, to my love, or to my vengeance ; but, be it as it may, I am glad she is saved."



CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTIC TIE.

We left Alaric in the lone chamber beneath the Temple of Diana, whither he had been consigned by Bellerus. When he was left alone he wondered much at what had transpired. He knew that the temple was a sacred place, and held in great reverence by the people, and that the priests thereof had much power. How, then, the humble craftsman could have gained access to these secret chambers, and pass guarded points as one who had due privilege, was a matter of astonishment to him. But it was not upon these points that he dwelt with the most feeling, for there was something moving within more weighty than mere surprise or astonishment. There seemed present with him a FATE. A spirit of prophecy and of power, which beckoned to him from its mystic throne, and bade him cast away the rusting implements of the past, and gird on a bright armor for the necessities of the future. He felt that a great need was awaiting a champion, and that the man who would respond must be pure and unselfish. He had heard enough, and felt enough, to arouse in his soul the will to perform a great work ; but when he thought of the result, when his mind dwelt upon the image which the consummation of that work presented, he could not but instinctively shrink from it.

It seemed a result too stupendous for him ever to realize ; and, with an effort of the will, he turned his thoughts into another channel.

He examined the walls and the furniture of the apartment, and he knew that such a place had never been made for a prison. The porphyry, the marble, and the epidote were not only highly polished, but in many places elaborately sculptured ; while the furniture, the couches, the cushion stands, and the footstools were covered with the finest of tapestry, and inlaid with gold and ivory. He tasted of the viands, and found them exquisitely cooked and flavored. He had made an inspection of the place, and resumed his seat upon the couch, when the door was opened, and some one entered. Alaric looked up, and beheld a figure which inspired him with sudden awe. It was an aged man, with a beard long and flowing, his form enveloped in a robe of silk, which fell from the shoulders to his feet. This vestment was adorned with gold and jewels of rare workmanship, and so arranged as to form characters of hidden meaning.

“Thy name is Alaric?” the old man said, after he had closed the door behind him.

“It is, sir,” our hero replied.

“Since I wish to be plain with thee, and have thee plain and frank with me, I will tell thee who and what I am. Didst ever hear of Pythion?”

“Pythion!” repeated the youth, gazing eagerly into the face of his visitor. “I know that my father had a bosom friend of that name. He was an architect of renown, and a philosopher, and came from Athens.”

“And has since become one of the priests of this temple,” added the old man. “Know, Alaric, that I am Pythion, and that I was thy father’s friend. And I

now give thee my right hand in token of the continuance of that friendship to thee." He extended his hand as he spoke, and the youth grasped it with confidence.

"I have need of friends," Alaric said, tremulously, for his heart was moved ; "and I accept thine with the deepest gratitude."

"And dost thou feel perfect trust in me?"

"Aye, from my inmost soul." And the youth spoke from a firm and reliable conviction. He had an intuitive perception and assurance of spirit that the man before him was to be implicitly trusted. And then he remembered what Bellerus had told him. In short, he had no fear, but the most abiding confidence and faith in the good-will of those who might meet him here.

"You must be fatigued and weary," suggested Pythion, taking a seat by Alaric's side.

"I am somewhat weary," our hero replied, "though I might bear much more of fatigue if there were need."

"But there is no need, my son ; and thou hadst better keep thy strength against the time of necessity, for such a time may ere long come. I know what thou hast passed through since the night set in, and I think thou hadst better rest awhile. On the morrow I shall have something of importance to communicate ; but now I will merely ask thee a simple question : Wouldst thou like to join a fraternity to which thy father belonged, the brethren of which would be true to thee in return for thy truth to them?"

"Aye, I should," quickly answered the youth.

"But suppose it were to put thy life in jeopardy, my son?"

"I should not hesitate at that ; for my life is not mine when my duty demands it."

“I am pleased with thy answer, and many others will be likewise pleased. And now follow me, and thou shalt find rest.”

Without question Alaric arose and followed the old man from the place. He went but a short distance when he found himself in a small apartment, the walls of which were hung with cinnamon colored tapestry, and where was a soft couch of lightest down, with blankets of silk and of wool.

Alaric did not remain long awake after he was left alone, for he was worn and weary with both bodily and mental fatigue. He reflected awhile upon the subject which Pythion had broached to him, but he did not seek to weary himself with useless conjecture, as he firmly believed that he was in the hands of those who would be true friends to him. He fell asleep, and though his dreams were of a strange, startling character, yet he finally slept soundly, and when he awoke he found Pythion by his bedside.

“Thou hast slept well and soundly,” said the old man, as he saw the youth fairly awake.

“I have certainly slept very soundly,” returned Alaric, lifting himself upon his elbow. “Is it yet day?”

“Aye, it is nearly noon.”

“Noon !” repeated our hero, starting further up. “And I have slept so long?”

“Thou hast not slept many hours, for it was well-nigh morning when I brought thee hither. But come—thou shalt have thy bath and thy breakfast, and then we may find business.”

Alaric arose and put on his garments, and then followed his conductor to a distant apartment where was a bath of warm water.

“Thou hast wondrous space of room beneath the

temple," said the youth, unable to conceal his surprise at all he saw.

"Thou shalt know all in good season," returned the priest, "though let me give thee a little light at this point. Thou couldst not have beheld what has here been shown thee had we not known that thou wouldst take upon thyself the solemn obligation necessary to bind thee to secrecy. Two men have pledged their lives for your faith. Were you to leave us now—that is, supposing we would let you go—and reveal what thou hast here seen, both Bellerus and Artabanus would die. Be assured it is no common privilege which has been granted thee; and perhaps the reason of our unusual favor may not be known to thee for some time to come."

With this, Alaric was left alone, and he at once proceeded to perform his ablution. He then found clean linen, and a raiment different from any he had before worn—a tunic of scarlet stuff, and a mantle of pure white, which was to be secured about the loins by a stout cord. In a little while Pythion reappeared, and he was reconducted to the apartment where he had first found himself on the night before, and where he now found food prepared for him. He ate, and when he was done, the old man asked him if he was now prepared to be initiated into the mysteries of the secret brotherhood of which mention had been made.

"Think well before you answer," said the priest, in a solemn tone; "for when you have crossed the threshold there can be no turning back. Your life, even, will be no longer your own. Wherever the light has shone, a thousand men would be ready to slay you on the instant of your treason!"

"My father was with you?" said the youth.

"Yes."

“And—pardon me for the question—who was it that bore me out from the usurper’s murderers, and carried me without the walls, on that fatal night that saw my father and my brother slain?”

“They were humble craftsmen, Alaric.”

“And why did they save me in preference to the many others who were in danger? I knew them not.”

“But they knew thee as the son of one of their honored brethren.”

“So I have thought since I came hither. Lead on, father. I am prepared and anxious.”

The youth was led to an adjoining apartment, where he suffered himself to be blindfolded, after which he was led away, he knew not whither. He only knew that he met with many obstructions, and that his guide gained him passage by many strict guards. Finally, he knew he was in an apartment which was most carefully guarded, and where many persons were assembled, as he could tell by the subdued sounds that broke upon the still air about him. He felt his bosom bared, and a strange voice addressed him. He was stricken with awe, but with nothing of terror. The ceremonies proceeded, and as the light gradually broke in upon him his emotions became deeper and more overwhelming. He was told of a ONE LIVING GOD, who was above all the gods of men; and he was asked if he could realize such a God. The thought had been with him for years—a germ of reason struggling for growth in his soul—and it burst now into Faith. He said he felt confidence in the great I AM—that in the Supreme JEHOVAH he would put his trust. He did not shrink from the obligation which was imposed upon him, for he was sure that he had heard the voice of Artabanus close by him.

Finally, the obstruction was removed from his eyes

and he was restored to light. He found himself upon his knees before an altar dedicated to the ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD. About him stood many men—stout, bold-looking men they were—all clothed in the humble garb of toil. There was no distinction of dress there. The lord and the artisan—the patrician and the slave—met upon an equality. It was new and strange, but it was holy and sublime. All that had been symbolized had looked towards a better world of humanity, and in all the striking lessons he had received, the one great truth of Brotherhood, and the mutual dependance of man upon his fellows, had been constantly presented. The craven might have shrunk from the mystic ordeal, but to the bold and manly heart there was something awe-inspiring and exalting in it all.

After this the youth was instructed in many mystic signs and tokens, and at length he received the hand of the Master in token of full confidence and fellowship. He gazed up into the Master's face, and he found it as he had supposed from the voice. It was Artabanus, the old hermit of Catalonia.

“Alaric, my son, and yet my brother,” the old man said, “I trust that you may never regret the obligations you have this night taken upon yourself. You now belong to an organization more extensive than you may have yet imagined. I could not tell you its numbers, for no man knows them; but wherever the light of science has spread, there will our brotherhood be found. In time you will know more than you know now, and great knowledge shall be given thee. These, whom you see about you, are a few of your brethren, and remember that they are each and every one bound to you as you have bound yourself to them. There is not a heart here that would not shed its last drop of

blood ere it would give up the sacred secret thou hadst entrusted to it."

Alaric recognized many of the faces about him as among those he had known in former years, though he could not recall the names of many of them. All were glad to take him by the hand, and he thought they seemed to regard him with more than ordinary interest.

Finally the assembly was dismissed, for most of those present had work to do, and ere long our hero was left alone with Pythion and Artabanus.

"Well, Alaric," asked the hermit, "what think you of it?"

"Of what?" returned the youth, who had been busy with his own thoughts.

"Of the new position in which you find yourself."

"I feel that I am as one brought out of darkness into light," was Alaric's ready answer.

"And you shall find the light increase as you advance," added Pythion.

"Are there many of the brotherhood in this city?" our hero asked.

"There are over four thousand."

"So many?"

"Aye! and all true and tried men, as thou mayest yet find. Perhaps thou hast wondered that we should have such freedom of passage within the limits of the Temple?"

"I have wondered at it, for I know that the people hold this Temple of Diana in great reverence, and think that only their own priests have access into its sacred places."

"And yet they know not their priests," said Artabanus, with a smile; "nor do they know the secret of the oracles to which they give ear. But, Alaric, this

temple was built by craftsmen of our brotherhood. From the lowest apprentice, who bore burdens upon his back, to the Master who presided over the workmen and over the work, all were of our mystic fraternity ; and the structure was prepared and reared that it might give us the shelter and protection we needed. The vast external pile was reared, and then, while a few men were apparently at work only in adorning the interior, hundreds were busily employed, both night and day, in constructing these mystic chambers ; and during the whole time there was not heard the sound of axe, hammer, or any tool of iron. The stones were all hewn, squared and numbered in the quarries where they were raised, and when brought hither they fitted to that exact nicety which precluded the necessity of noise or confusion. This was done long before our day. The craftsmen who fashioned these massive chambers have long since passed to their spiritual home ; but their valuable secrets they have left to us, and they have left to us many virtues which we should strive to emulate."

The more the youth heard the more deeply was he moved with wonder and admiration, and so much was he inspired by the things which he saw and felt, that he was fully prepared to lay down his life, if need be, rather than prove false to a single responsibility he had assumed. There was something in the idea of the ONE GOD, the SUPREME RULER, the JEHOVAH, that sank deeply into his soul, and greatly exalted all his conception of the spiritual and immortal part of his nature. He had held a vague, dreamy notion of some Infinity before, but nothing which his understanding had reached.

When our hero returned to the chamber where he had first rested and refreshed himself, it was very nearly

nightfall, and the old hermit began to prepare for taking his leave.

“I would like to go with you to your mountain cave,” said Alaric.

“We have just been considering upon that point,” returned Artabanus; “and I had about made up my mind that you should go and keep me company for awhile. We have had reports from our men, and we find that every avenue of the city is most strictly guarded. The king feels sure that you have not yet escaped beyond the walls, and he means that you shall not.”

“But I can find some disguise.”

“Ah, my son, you could find no disguise that would answer you; for the orders of the soldiers are such that they must examine every person whom they do not surely know.”

“Then I am in a prison, after all!”

“Not so, Alaric,” returned Artabanus, somewhat severely. “Even if thou couldst not leave this place at present, be assured that your hands would find better work to perform than such as is usually given to prisoners. But when our former brethren constructed this place they knew the nature of man, and they knew that kings would oftentimes be tyrants; so they planned ways by which their friends could escape from the city in times of great need. I think there would be no danger in your bearing me company. What think you Pythion?”

“I see not how there can be any,” the priest replied. “I have not heard that the king has set any guard without the walls; but, even if he has, they would be only placed by the highways, and on the coast.”

“You shall go, my son,” pronounced the hermit. “A

few days upon the mountain will revive your frame from the fatigue of your long voyage."

"And can I not see Ianthe before I go?"

"No; that were impossible."

"She is well?"

"She was when I last heard from her. But come. The sun is already down, and we have some distance to go. You had better leave the executioner's sword which you brought hither with you, and take one which our priestly warden will give you."

The youth was furnished with a garb such as the better class of artisans usually wore, consisting of a tunic of dark woollen cloth, and a mantle of colored cotton which could be worn from the shoulder, or thrown over the arm, at pleasure. The sword which was given him was of Egyptian manufacture, being longer than the Roman weapon, and of finer material and workmanship. When this was girded upon his loins he was ready to set forth with the hermit, and Pythion lighted a small torch, and conducted them through many apartments and curious windings, until he reached a door of solid brass, which was set within a wall of the same metal. This was thrown open by a guard who was stationed there, and here the priest resigned the torch into the hermit's hands.

"Look well to our men," said Artabanus; "and if from this extraordinary guard which is now posted in the city, their movements are likely to be noticed, let them remain at home for awhile."

"It shall be done, my master."

Then the hermit and his youthful companion stepped over the brazen threshold, and the heavy door was closed behind them.



CHAPTER XII.

A RISE, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

"We are now beyond the compass of the temple," said Artabanus, after the brazen door had been shut behind them, "and within a passage which must have cost great time and labor. It is said that our brethren were three years in building this way. Its course is many feet below the surface of the earth, and the walls are of necessity impervious to water."

Alaric gazed about him. He found himself within a passage some ten feet wide, with an arched roof about the same height, the walls and floor of which were of the most massive and substantial masonry. It was truly calculated to inspire wonder, and the youth was profuse in his questions and remarks.

They hurried on at a swift pace, and at the end of an hour they came to a point where the passage seemed cut entirely off by a solid wall. But the hermit found a way of egress by opening a secret door, and, when they had passed through, this door, which was simply a movable rock, was reclosed. This brought them to a sort of chamber, much larger and higher than the passage, and the youth noticed that the floor was strewn with rubbish and dirt, and with the bones of animals.

"Perhaps you wonder at this," remarked the old man,

as he noticed that his companion was gazing upon the accumulated mass of dirt and rubbish.

"I must confess that I thought it somewhat curious," replied Alaric.

"And you will find the rest of our way in equal confusion," added Artabanus; "and there is reason for it. If you will cast your eyes behind you, you will find that the wall through which we have just passed offers little promise to any stranger of any passage beyond."

Alaric gazed around, as his guide held up the torch, and he was surprised to find that the rear wall had the appearance of being the face of a solid ledge.

"It would puzzle you to find the way back," remarked the hermit, with a smile.

"It certainly would," replied the youth.

"In short," pursued the other, "you could not find it; nor will I stop to instruct you in the secret now. But I will explain the seeming negligence. That end of this mystic way which opens into the subterranean chambers of the temple could not be reached by mortal man, except he be duly entitled to the secret; but this outer end cannot be so guarded. Some wanderer might stumble upon the entrance; so we have caused this disposition of things to be made. If a stranger should, by any means, make his way hither, he would only find an old cavern, built for he could not tell what, and given up to reptiles and wild beasts. He might think that he was the first who had explored the place for ages."

Alaric said that he understood it; and then they moved on. The way soon grew more narrow, and they were forced to move more slowly and carefully; but ere long they stepped forth upon a broad shelf of rock, and were in the open air. A winding, dubious way led them down to the foot of the mountain, and in a

few moments more Alaric recognized the path which led him up towards the hermit's cave. It was a clear, bright evening, and they walked leisurely along, conversing as they went, and in due time they reached the cave in safety. An hour was spent in conversation, mostly upon subjects of the past, and then they retired for the night, the youth being conducted to an inner branch of the cavern, where a couch of leopard-skins was prepared.

Alaric had much to think of—so much that he could think clearly upon no one point, and after getting thoroughly entangled in his mind, he fell asleep. How long he had slept he could not tell, though he seemed to have rested some time, when he was aroused by hearing a footstep in the outer cave ; and as he raised himself upon his elbow he heard some one call the name of Artabanus. The voice was quick and eager, as though urged by dire necessity, and the youth sprang from his couch and hurried out, and as he reached the outer apartment he could just distinguish the outlines of a man standing at the entrance. He was upon the point of speaking, when the hermit appeared, bearing a lighted torch in his hand, and Alaric then recognized the newcomer to be one of the men whom he had seen within the mystic chambers of the temple.

“How now, Marco ?” asked Artabanus. “Why hast thou come up at this strange hour ?”

“Are we alone ?” returned the man.

“None are here who may not hear what thou hast to communicate.”

“Thy presence is needed at the temple immediately,” said the messenger, in hurried tones. “There is suspicion afloat, and a blow has fallen !”

“A blow ! Speak, Marco, what mean you ?”

“Alas ! master, a brother has been called upon to

sacrifice his life rather than betray his companions. Good Proteus has fallen !”

“ The silversmith ?”

“ Yes.”

“ But how ?”

“ He was returning home from the temple a few hours since, in company with the craftsmen who are servitors at the royal palace. The king’s lieutenant, Leos, with a party of soldiers, having recognized the garbs of the members of the royal household, and being anxious to ascertain what they did in the public streets at that late hour, laid in wait, and made an attempt to arrest them ; but those whom they were most anxious to secure made good their escape, while Proteus, being well advanced in years, alone fell into their hands. The lieutenant demanded of him the names of his companions, but he would not give them. He was then taken to the guard-house, and upon his still refusing to answer, he was stripped naked from the waist up, and lashed to a pillar, with his arms bound behind him. Then a sharp spear was presented to his bared bosom, and an answer again demanded. Repeated demands were as repeatedly refused, even after the flesh was pierced, and finally the cruel steel was driven to his heart !”

“ Is this thing so ?” asked Artabanus, in a husky, tremulous voice.

“ Yes, master. It happened since midnight, and news was at once brought to us. Pythion is anxious to see you, and the others demand your counsel.”

“ Alas, poor Proteus ! He was one of our noblest men, one most worthy ! But there shall be a reckoning for this. Alaric,” the old man added, turning to the youth, and speaking with unusual depth and strength, “ the hour draws nigh in which thou shalt give report

of a charge committed to thee by heaven ! Marco, what is the hour ?”

“ It lacks not more than an hour of daybreak.”

“ Then I will hasten down with thee. I think, however, that I shall only counsel perfect quietness for awhile. The hour is not yet come. Alaric, thou hadst best remain here until I return.”

“ I will do so.”

“ And thou wilt not venture far away ?”

“ No, father. I will be very careful. Thou shalt find me here when thou returnest.”

In a few minutes Artabanus was ready to set out, and when Alaric was left alone, he returned to his couch, but he could not sleep. The thought of the old silversmith's death had so wrought upon his feelings, that further repose was out of the question, and he put on his mantle and walked out upon the plateau in front of the cave, where he paced up and down until the sun arose from the bosom of the sea. He then went in and prepared a meal for himself, and having eaten this, he found entertainment for a while over an old manuscript which the hermit had left.

The sun had been up two hours, and yet the old tutor did not return. Alaric paced up and down before the cave, ever and anon stopping to gaze off upon the distant city, until he had become tired of this occupation, and finally he resolved to walk down the mountain and meet his old friend, having no doubt that Artabanus would soon return. He thought there could be no danger. He would not venture upon the highway—he would only keep the path, and wait, if need be, for his host. He buckled on his sword, and taking a stout oaken staff in his hand, he set forth. He pursued his way down the rugged descent slowly and easily, pondering and talking with himself as he went, and at last

reached the foot of the mountain. Here he sat down for a little while, and knocked the small stones about with the end of his staff.

The sea was only a short distance off, and as the sounds of the murmuring waves broke upon his ear, he fancied that he should like to go down and snuff up the invigorating atmosphere from the briny water. He could go and return before Artabanus would come. If he gave the thought of danger a place in his mind, it was only for a moment; and under very light consideration at that. The point where he would strike the shore was at some distance from the city, and a place not much frequented. The path by which he had come down from the little stream, where it leaped along the side of the mountain, was not the one that led by Glycon's cot, the latter being further to the south, and striking the coast some two miles distant from where he now was.

The youth gave one more look in the direction from which Artabanus was to come, and as he did not see him, he arose and moved toward the sea. It was only along at the foot of a low cliff—then among a mass of detached rocks—then through a straggling copse of stunted bushes and trees—and he stood upon the sandy shore of the sea. He had just reached this point, and had stopped to gaze off upon the boundless expanse of water, when a sudden exclamation close at hand startled him from his reverie. He gazed around and saw four soldiers, who had been standing beneath the shade of a cypress tree. He had come out so near to them that they could have reached him with their spears as he passed them, but they had evidently suffered him to go on that they might observe him, more closely. As they started to approach him, his first thought was of flight; but he could not regain the path, for they had stepped

into his way, so he resolved, if there was danger, to face it. He cast his eyes quickly about him to assure himself that there were no more at hand, and then he faced the armed men who had interrupted him.

"It is he !" said one of the soldiers to another, as our hero turned his face towards them.

"It is, most surely," was the response.

"Is it of me you speak ?" asked Alaric.

"Yes," replied he who seemed to be the leader of the squad.

"And what say ye of me ?"

"That thou art one of whom we are in search, and we call upon thee, in the king's name, to surrender."

"Surrender ?" repeated Alaric, as though he were greatly surprised. "And for what ?"

"Thou knowst very well for what. But mark ye : We know how thou didst escape from the palace, and how, with some assistance, thou didst dispose of the lieutenant, Fingal ; and, furthermore, we know that by some extraordinary means thou hast got out from the city, but thou art now our prisoner. Thou canst not hope to escape us. So wilt thou surrender quietly ?"

Alaric hesitated only for a moment. If he surrendered, his chances of life were less than they would be in an engagement with the men before him, so he answered :

"I know of no authority which can command me a prisoner, and I shall not surrender myself as such."

"Why—fool ! We shall kill thee on the spot if thou art stubborn."

"And what will your king do if he gains me into his power ?" returned Alaric. He did not deny his identity, for he believed the soldiers knew him well enough.

"That is none of our business," said the leader of the gang. "Our business is to arrest thee, which we shall straightway do."

"Then do it," returned the youth, drawing his sword, and still retaining the stout staff in his left hand.

"Dead or alive !" our orders were," explained the officer.

"You'll take me dead if you take me at all."

At this the leader, as though in a fit of rage, threw his spear, but Alaric had no trouble in dodging it ; but he did find trouble quickly afterwards, for while the first rushed upon him with his drawn sword, the other three pressed forward with their pointed spears, though, fortunately, they did not immediately thrust with them, seeming to hope that their close proximity to his breast would intimidate him, and lead him to surrender. But they were doomed to disappointment ; Alaric saw, from their very look, that these three meant to take him alive if possible, so he directed his special attention, for a moment, to their leader, who had already prepared for a furious thrust at his bosom. He knocked the blow down with his staff, and then with a quick, strong arm, drove his sword through the fellow's neck, and instantly afterwards forced him back by planting one foot in the pit of his stomach.

The man fell backward, and this was a signal for his companions to go at the work in earnest, and they did so.

"Surrender, or we shall take your life !" cried one of them.

But Alaric made no answer save by striking down the point of one spear and leaping away from the thrust of another. The soldiers had now become fierce and resolute, and they set upon him without further parley. He found his stout staff of great service to him in such a conflict, for by it he was enabled to knock down many blows which he might not otherwise have avoided. At length he dealt one man a blow upon the neck which

laid him sprawling upon the sand, but at the same moment he received a wound under the left arm. He felt the sharp steel enter his flesh, and he knew that the wound must be a dangerous one. He might soon grow weak from loss of blood, and then his fate would be sealed. This thought nerved him up to greater power, and he met the two remaining men with the purpose of making quick work of it. He dodged around in a circle until he got them separated, and then as quick as thought, he turned upon the one nearest to him, knocked away his spear-point, and ran him through the body. In a moment more he met the other ; he felt his own arm growing weak, but a thought of the tyrant's purpose—a thought of Ianthe—sent the thrill of power along his nerves, and the last soldier quickly rolled upon the sand with his head split clean open between the ears.

Alaric saw that his enemies were all dead, and with a quick step he turned towards the mountain. But the quickness of movement was soon gone. The extraordinary excitement had been lifted from him, and he now felt all his weakness. O ! could he not reach the cave ! Or—if not so, could he not at least reach a point where Artabanus would find him. He struggled on ; he staggered as one who is drunk with much wine—he reeled like a tree that is riven by the hurricane—he grew sick and faint at heart—his vision became dim and obscured, and his brain seemed to whirl in circles which grew less and less. He raised his eyes toward the mountain, but all was dark as night—he stretched forth his hands, as though for help, and fell forward upon his face ere yet he had reached the cypress wood. There was a vision before him, apparent to his senses, of the king, of the temple, of the mystic brotherhood—

fading, fading—till one sweet face was left, and with the name of Ianthe trembling upon his nerveless lips utter oblivion fell upon him.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN A STRANGE LAND, AND A STRANGE FATE.

When consciousness returned Alaric found himself upon a soft couch, and as he attempted to move he discovered that he was bound in his place. For a while he had only a shadowy perception of things, either present or past, but gradually his mind arose from the chaotic gloom, and he finally remembered where he had been. At first, in his disturbed imagination, it seemed as though he were at sea, and on his way from Corinth to Sicily. But he remembered that he had made that passage, and that he had reached his destination in safety. He had entered the city of Syracuse, and the tyrant king had seized upon him. Was he now in the royal dungeon? No. He had escaped thence, and found refuge in the Temple of Diana. Was he upon some soft bed prepared by the priests of the Mystic Tie, and undergoing yet the ordeal of his matriculation? No. He had passed all that, and had left the temple by a secret way, and returned with the old hermit to his cave. Now his thoughts became more clear. He remembered the mission of the messenger from the temple; the departure of Artabanus; his loneliness upon the mountain; his descent thereof; his coming upon the sea-shore; his meeting with the king's soldiers, and his battle with them. And here the cloud settled down upon his memory. He knew that he had

slain his antagonists, and that he himself had been wounded, and he had a faint recollection of struggling towards the mountain after his work had been done; but whether he had reached the cave, or whether he had fallen by the way, he could not tell.

Again the youth tried to move, and again he perceived that he was bound. He was now able to take some note of things about him, and his first realization next after the restraint upon his limbs was that he was swayed to and fro with a ceaseless, uneven motion. At first he had thought that this might be the effect of some hallucination consequent upon the injuries he had received; but he now concluded that he was upon the sea; and as his observations extended he had assurance upon this point. He was in a narrow, low apartment, which was excessively filthy and dirty, and the light to which came from an open scuttle overhead, from which descended a rough ladder. It was a compartment of the hold of a ship. The motion was now painfully palpable to him, and he could hear the water as it dashed against the outside. He closed his eyes, and then recalled the circumstances which had just passed through his mind, for it seemed as though it must be a troubled dream, after all. It was too strange, too fraught with momentous events, too full of marvelous adventure, to meet his reason as being all real. But he could not cast it from him. He assured himself that he was now awake, and all the rest followed as a matter of course.

As soon as his mind was clear upon this point, he turned his attention to his present situation. He could discover that he was upon a low cot, or couch, upon which were soft cushions, and that he was bound to it by broad bands of cloth passing over his legs and breast. He felt the pain of the wound under his arm,

and he could feel that it had been thickly swathed. There was a dull, sinking sensation about the heart, and a sense of pain in the head and left shoulder, and in the left breast. At length he called for help. He called loudly, and the effort not only cost him much labor but it sent a throbbing pain through his system, and produced feverish heat all over his body. In a little while a man came down the ladder. He was a coarse, rough-looking fellow clad in a seaman's garb and wore a short sword suspended by the wide belt that confined his dirty tunic.

"Have you come to your senses?" he asked, as he approached the cot upon which our hero lay.

"Yes," replied Alaric. "And where am I?"

"Can't you guess where you are?"

"I think I am on the sea."

"You've guessed right there, my master. You are on the sea and in good hands."

"But how came I here? Whither am I going?"

"You came hither because we brought you," replied the man, sitting down upon the floor as he spoke. "We were upon the coast near Syracuse, and as we walked along we found the dead bodies of four soldiers. We overhauled them until we were satisfied there was no life in them, and while we were wondering how they had been slain, one of my men discovered you, my master. You were close by the trees spread out flat on your face, and at first we thought you, too, were dead; but we saw that blood was trickling from a wound under your left arm, and upon feeling we found that there was warmth about the heart. Some of my fellows proposed that we should leave you, but I thought a live man was better than a dead one, and I had you carried to my boat. Some soldiers gave us chase just as we reached the water's edge, but we escaped them, and got

you safely on board the ship. And here you are, not so sound as you might be, but safe from dying on the hot sand."

"You have not told me whither you are carrying me," said Alaric, after a pause of some moments.

"Why, we shall have to carry you wherever we go, I suppose," replied the sailor, evasively.

"But you know where you are going?"

"We may strike the shores of Carthage. We point that way now."

The youth wished to ask many more questions, but the pain had grown more intense in his head, and there was a faintness overcoming him.

"I cannot escape," he murmured; "why have you bound me?"

"Why, bless your soul, how else should we have kept you in your place? You'd roll off every minute if you were left free to go with the motion of the ship. But you feel worse. Does the bandage pain you?"

"I am faint—my head swims," replied Alaric, striving to recover himself.

"That's the result of the labor you have been at to find out where you were. But we'll do the best we can for you. We are used to taking care of wounds."

Thus speaking the man went to the foot of the ladder and called to someone on deck, and shortly a second one of the crew came down. He was clad the same as his companion, and was also armed. The thought flitted through the youth's mind that he was on board one of the pirate vessels of the Carthaginians, of which he had heard so much, but he had become too faint to make further inquiries. He knew that the bandage was taken from his body, and that the straps of cloth were loosened, and that he was raised higher up; and he could hear the two men talk as they came to the wound, but gradu-

ally their conversation sounded strangely in his ear, things swam in his vision, his head reeled, and he sank back again into insensibility. And now followed long days of pain and anguish, of alternate light and darkness, of seasons of rest and unrest. Rough men nursed him and lifted him about, the wind and the tempest howled in his ears, and the huge seas beat over and drenched him. There were moments of lucid thought, then followed strange phantasies and paroxysms. The blood leaped wildly and hotly through his veins for a season, then followed faintness and cold as though the avenues of his system were all frozen up. A while he was upon the sea—the wind, and the tempest, and the drenching rain were there—and then he was borne upon land. Strange voices sounded in his ear, strange visions flitted before him.

And so passed the days, for how long he could not tell until reason once more dawned upon him. He awoke, as from a long and terrible dream, and found himself upon a low bed, within a small apartment, with an open window close by his side. The sweet perfume from a thousand flowers and fragrant shrubs was wafting in upon him, and the atmosphere was warm and soft. He raised himself upon his elbow, and gazed out from the window. He could see a broad garden stretching away to the foot of a gentle hill, filled with vines, and fruit-trees, and flowering shrubs. There were arbors and fountains, and he saw people in the distance walking, who wore strange garbs. By and by a door of lattice-work was opened, and an old woman entered. She was dark of complexion, as though reared beneath the rays of a scorching sun, and her simple dress of white linen was scant and poor. She stopped when she saw the youth upon his elbow, and a look of satisfaction dwelt upon her face.

“Ha ! Alaric is better,” she said, with a strange idiom in her speech.

“Am I among friends ?” our hero quickly asked.

“You have been cared for,” was the reply.

“But you know me.”

“Oho ? dost wonder at that ? Thou hast told of thyself enough, methinks, for us to know thee.”

“I have been sick.”

“And thy tongue has had no guide,” added the woman.

“Have I been sick for a long time ?”

“For the full passage of a moon. The moon was well-nigh waned when they brought thee hither, and another has well-nigh followed it.”

“And I have lain here all this time ?”

“Thou hast.”

“And thou hast attended me ?”

“I, together with others. But thou surely hast thy reason now,” the women said, moving nearer to the cot and gazing sharply into the invalid’s face. “The wildness has left thine eye, and thy lips have assumed the color of the pomegranate.”

“I have my senses perfectly,” returned Alaric, sinking back upon his pillow ; for he was weak, and the effort he had made had fatigued him. “And now, wilt thou tell me where I am ?”

The woman hesitated, and finally answered by asking :

“Hast thou spoken the truth in thy ravings when thou saidst thou hadst been a child of misfortune, though not by birth of humble station ?”

“I have been most unfortunate, as my present position amply proves,” said Alaric, “but as to my birth—I was born as others are born. Where did I say I was born ?”

"In many places. Once, in Corinth ; once, in Sicily ; and then you said in Athens."

"Then never mind my birth-place, for it cannot matter to any human being now. Tell me where I am."

"Wert thou ever in Carthage?"

"No."

"Then know that thou art in Carthage now, and close upon the coast."

"In the great city?"

"No. The great city is some leagues distant. Thou art to the east of there, upon the shore which faces the rising sun. But I will answer no more questions now, for thou art very weak, and already thou showest fatigue. My name is Numa."

"And art thou mistress here?"

"Me?" echoed the woman in surprise. "Good spirits, no. I am but a servant here. My master is called Torus, the vine-grower. To him belongs the place. Thou wert brought hither by a ship, and my master took thee out of pity—so he said."

The woman soon went away, and shortly afterwards a man entered, bearing a box in his hand. He proved to be a physician, and when Alaric sought to question him he only shook his head and stroked his beard with a mysterious air, and bade him remain quiet if he would live.

"Thou wert as one in the grave when I first saw thee," he said, "and thy life was gone ; but by my power I returned it unto thee. Let not thine own indiscretion sink thee a second time !"

The youth quickly saw that there was nothing to be gained from this man of information, so he quietly submitted to his manipulations, which were of a highly physical character. But the patient cared not how much magic the man performed over him, so long as

his drugs were potent, and his prescriptions of diet healthful and invigorating.

Six days passed away from the time of the return of Alaric's reason, and he had gained rapidly. He was able now to sit up, and, by the help of a staff, he could walk some. He had been out into the garden once, and from thence he could look off upon the distant sea. He found, also, that the house of Torus was an extensive one, and that there were many out-buildings, some of which were constructed in the highest perfection of art. The domain was situated in a deep valley, and as far as his eye could reach he saw the grape-vines creeping over the trellices and hedges, and up into the trees, and upon the buildings. He saw many men at work—some of the Ethip skin, and others of fairer face. It was all beautiful, but it could afford him no pleasure. Aside from the memories of the past which afforded him so much food for mental pain, there were causes for alarm in the present. Of late he had questioned Numa more closely, and she had refused to answer him without even a pretext for such a refusal. He had strange thoughts of the character of his present position, and the old woman seemed to comprehend the drift of his suspicions, for she shook her head most emphatically, and told him that he must not ask her such questions.

.At length, Alaric was strong enough to walk as he pleased, and the physician said he was well. He sat in the little room where his bed was, engaged in his own thoughts, when he heard a step by his side, and upon looking up he beheld a man, with a dark face, and long beard of a jetty blackness, and clothed in apparel of rare fabric and workmanship. In frame he was large and powerful, and, in feature, stern and commanding.

“So thou hast recovered, it seems.”

Thus spoke the wealthy vine-grower as he stood and gazed upon the youth. There was no sympathy in his tone—no friendliness—no such tone as Alaric had expected from the man under whose roof he had been so carefully nursed and attended; but he spoke rather with a chilling voice, and sternly.

“I am well-nigh recovered, kind sir,” replied our hero, thinking that the man’s manner of speech might be peculiar to him; “and I trust that I may at some time have the opportunity to prove my gratitude. I think I speak to the owner of this domain.”

“You do.”

“And wilt thou tell me, good sir, how I came here, and why?”

“Thou wert brought by a ship; and you were left here because I made a bargain with the captain to that effect. He found thee dying. He carried thee on board his ship, and nursed thee until he delivered thee here. My physician said he could cure thee, and so I took thee.”

These last words struck with a painful, overwhelming force upon the soul of the youth.

“And if I could not have been cured, thou wouldst not have taken me?” he said hoarsely and tremulously.

“Of course not. Why should I? I want no dead men in my vineyard.”

“And I am—”

“My bondman! I bought thee of the captain.”

The vision had not been false! With a deep groan Alaric sank down, and buried his face in his hands. He was a bondman in a strange land, with no home and no kindred, and the will of a master was to be his law.

“Oh!” he cried, in his utter agony of spirit, “why did not the spear-head reach my heart? And was it for this that I braved so many dangers?”

The vine-grower made no reply, but went out, leaving his bondman still bowed down with the great agony that had come upon him, trusting, no doubt, that time would heal the wounded spirit as it had the wounded flesh.

CHAPTER XIV.

AGRIPPA.

Ianthe had no need to stretch her imagination much in order to bring to mind cause for greatest alarm. In fact, every circumstance, past and present, contributed to enhance her fears, and let her thoughts dwell where they would, only phantoms of threatening aspect arose before her. If she called up the days of her childhood, there hung over them the deep vail of mystery which she could not penetrate, and which seemed to shut the sunlight out even from those times of innocence. If she thought of maturing years she only remembered how she had been guarded, and how even her liberty had been sacrificed to this same mystic vail. If she thought of Alaric, it was only that he might be the prisoner, or the victim, of a merciless tyrant. If she thought of Bellerus, whom she still called father, and who was, in truth, a father to her, it was only to remember his parting words, so full of sadness and gloom, and to see again the look of pain that marked his noble face when last he turned from her. If she thought of the king her fears all reached their climax, and imagination stood appalled before the terrible possibilities.

It had been three days since she had seen the monarch—and four days since she had seen her father. During

that time not one of her own sex had been present with her, but only the black eunuch waited upon her. Once she had ventured to ask him how long she was to remain there ; but his answer had been evasive, and she had asked him no more. He looked well to her physical comfort, and seemed ever ready to obey her in all things not conflicting with the duties he owed to his master. She had a comfortable suite of apartments but they were only a prison, after all. Beyond their walls she could not move, for bolts, and bars, and stern, stout guards were in her way.

She sat in the outer room of her suite, close by a window over which crept a cluster of flowering vines, and the last rays of the setting sun were lingering amid the foliage. She had just thrown the casement further open, when she heard a footfall behind her and on turning she beheld the king. A sudden faintness overcame her for the moment, resulting from the quick throbbing of her heart, for she had been thinking of the monarch, and was just trying to drive his image from her mind, when he thus presented himself.

"I hope I find the lady Ianthé well this evening," Pyrrho said, in a smooth tone.

Should she hide her real feelings, and tell a lie, or should she speak as she felt? She might be guarded in her speech, but she would not be false. So thought the maiden as she replied :

"I am far from well in mind, sire."

"There must be seasons when we all have trials of mind, sweet lady," the king responded. "Such is the lot of humanity. But I trust that you have found your outward comfort well cared for."

"I have no cause for complaint on that score, sire save that I have been deprived of my liberty."

"And even liberty, lady, is but a name. Who ha

perfect liberty? We have all certain restraints put upon us, which are rendered necessary by the very organization of society. We are all the slaves of necessity, and must bow to the will of nature. The slave does not breathe who has more restraints put upon him than have I. Think not of mere physical liberty while there are so many things to be secured of vastly greater importance."

"I have not seen my father, sire. You said you would conduct me to him."

"You speak of Bellerus?"

"Yes. He is my father."

"Dost really think he is?" asked the king, gazing sharply into her face. He noticed how she hesitated, and how she was confused; but she finally answered:

"He has been my father."

"But thou knowest that he is not thy father by any line of blood?"

"He may not be."

"But do you not *know*?"

"I know nothing at all about it. If Bellerus is not in reality my father, I only know that he has ever given to me a father's care and a father's love, and he is the only father I ever knew."

"Tell me, lady," pursued Pyrrho, gazing more sharply than before into the maiden's face, "hast thou no knowledge whatever of thy parentage?"

"Not beyond him whom I now call father."

Surely there was no deception in that sweet face. The image of truth was palpable there, and the king seemed so to feel, for he appeared to be satisfied upon a point which, but a moment before, had threatened to worry him.

"I had imagined," he said, "that thou wert an orphan, and as such I had pity on thee."

“Then thou wilt allow me to return to Bellerus?”

“Ah, lady,” the monarch replied, with a shake of the head, and assuming a solemn look, “good old Bellerus knows too well what is for thy good to suffer thee to leave this place. Hast thou thought any upon the subject of which I have before spoken to thee?”

“Sire, in mercy, do not think of that again!” cried Ianthe, starting impulsively from her seat, and clasping her hands together.

“Not think of it? Why, I have thought of nothing else since first the idea entered my mind, nor can I think of anything else. Sweet maiden, thou must be mine!”

“No, no, sire! You said you had pity on me.”

“And so I have.”

“Then, in pity, release me from such a fate.”

“Wert thou alone to be considered, lady, I might do it, but remember, I have pity on myself as well. I have a care for my own heart, and cannot see it crushed. It has been decided, as I have said, and thou art to be my queen.”

“Oh! sire! In mercy say not so!”

“I have said it, and the word is gone forth.”

“No, no—it cannot—it shall not be! I can never be your queen!”

“Thou dost but waste words, Ianthe. I have spoken it, and no power can swerve me from my course.”

“My father! O, my father! Let me see him!”

“Do you still speak of Bellerus?”

“Aye, of him to whom thou saidst I should return.”

“Then know that Bellerus is dead!”

“Dead!” shrieked the maiden, starting to her feet. “He is not dead! O, tell me not that!”

“I tell thee he is dead!”

“And thou didst murder him!” Ianthe cried, starting back as though from a poisonous serpent.

“Not so, fair one. I would have saved him if it had lain in my power. My soldiers were sent out in search of the bold youth Alaric, whom I wished much to question. They met him near one of the gates, and Bellerus was with him. The two were commanded to stop, but they refused. Thereupon the soldiers declared their authority, announcing that they acted in the name of the king, and they supposed that the twain would immediately surrender, but they did not so. Both Alaric and Bellerus made opposition, thereby throwing the royal guard back upon their own defense, and in the end they were slain.”

“Alaric and Bellerus were slain?”

“Yes, both.”

“Both! both!” gasped the stricken girl, shrinking back and covering her face. “O, no!” she added, in a spasmodic tone, starting again to her feet, and stretching forth her hands imploringly to the king, “it cannot be! They are not dead! There is no need that you should deceive me. You have power enough without that. Say that they are not dead! O! say that they are not!”

“I could not say so and tell the truth, for they are both in the land of shadows. So thou hast no other home but this, and here thou hadst better make thyself contented.”

“Contented!” cried Ianthe, supported for the moment by the contempt she felt for the tyrant before her. “Be contented here—in this palace—and with the thought ever present which thou wouldst force upon me! O, thou canst know little of a true heart. If they are dead, their blood is upon thee.”

“Nay, fair lady, thou shouldst not so defame him who is to be thy lord and husband.”

“Thou my husband? O, may death come and claim

me, too, ere that consummation is done ! I tell thee, king, I will not be thine !”

“Now, sweet one,” resumed the monarch, with a devilish look, “thou dost put me upon my authority, and I tell thee plainly thou shalt be what I have promised. And mark you—the time shall not be long. Ere another week has passed, Ianthe shall be my queen ! I swear it, by all the gods of heaven and of earth, and the power exists not that can thwart me in my purpose ! Now, maiden, thou canst reflect upon it at thy leisure. I simply give thee the fate that is thine—marked out for thee plainly—and from which thou canst not escape, and thou mayest ponder upon it as thou wilt. Only let me say this : Thy peace and comfort in time to come may depend much upon the disposition which is manifested now. I trust you understand me. Yet, Ianthe, I will be kind to thee, if thou shalt show thyself deserving of my kindness. I wish so to be, if thou wilt only permit it. So do not misunderstand me. The case stands simply thus : **THOU MUST BE MY QUEEN !** So far it is fixed as firmly as any decree of Jupiter. But beyond that it rests much with thee. I need say no more.”

“Thou givest me a fatal favor !” the maiden said, sinking down, and pressing her folded hands upon her bosom. “I ask for life as the only boon worth having, and thou kindly offerest me the choice of means by which I must die. I say to thee now, king, if thou makest me thy wife, thou shalt wed but a lump of clay ! So I care not for the joys or sorrows beyond it.”

“Thou wilt think better of this when thou art more cool, so I will leave thee to thine own reflections.”

With this the king turned and left the apartment, and when Ianthe was alone she leaped to her feet, and raised her hands above her head.

“Never ! never !” she solemnly exclaimed. “If my

father and Alaric be dead, I will join them ere I will be that man's queen ! If I should let my life forth myself, some kind hand would give me sepulchre. But he lies to me. If they be dead, he killed them. O ! so meant his strange words when he said he would lead me to Bellerus' arms ! And my father foresaw it all. When last he spoke to me, in this room, the thought of death was upon him, and 'twas that made him so sad. O ! it is all plain now. Did not the tyrant seek Alaric's life in the most cruel manner ? Aye, he has murdered them ! And shall I be his wife ? Shall I place my hand within the one all red with my father's blood ? The gods defend me !"

As she ceased speaking, she sank back upon the couch, and rested her brow upon her hands. Her thoughts were wild and confused, and a sense of pain was upon her heart. And even when she could control her thoughts, the pain was not lessened. She believed that both her father and Alaric were dead, and she had two good reasons for such belief besides the avowal of the king. First : she knew that, from circumstances which had transpired, Pyrrho must desire to have them removed. And second : she knew that the tyrant never hesitated at any work of blood, if it pleased him to have it done.

And if they were gone, she was indeed without a home ! Where were her friends ? Upon whom could she call ? Alas ! there were none ! It was with this thought of utter loneliness and helplessness upon her that she allowed her head to sink upon the cushion of her couch, and her groans of despair to break forth. She lay there while the darkness crept over the palace and over the city—she lay there while the eunuch came in with her food, and noticed him not. He left a lamp burning upon the sideboard and went away without

disturbing her. It was an hour after this, and she was upon the point of arising to close the casement, for the chill night air was coming in upon her, when she thought she heard her door softly opened. She looked around, and beheld a man of most strange appearance—it was a presence that filled her with both fear and awe.

He was aged, and his hair, of snowy whiteness, hung low upon his shoulders, while his beard, of the same snowy hue, floated far down upon his bosom. His form, which appeared large and of good proportions, was enveloped in a cloak or mantle of black, which was secured about the loins by a broad belt of gold. This mantle was wrought with strange characters upon the breast and upon the hem; and like characters were engraved upon the golden belt. Upon his head he wore a hat such as the maiden had never before seen, its color being black like his robe, and its shape tall and pointed, like a cone. He advanced toward her with a slow step, and put forth his hand, as though he would have her keep silence. She could now see his eyes and his brow, and she thought he had a kind look.

“Let not my presence alarm thee, my child,” he spoke, in a low, gentle tone, “for I come to thee upon a message of mercy.”

How strange! Had not she seen this man before? Had not that voice sounded upon her ear at some former time? Or was it only a freak of her imagination? But she felt confidence in him at once. Perhaps it was natural that, in her then desolate situation, she should instinctively cling to the first opportunity of hope that presented itself; but the human heart is not apt to reach forth after an unworthy object upon a natural impulse. Those impressions which first strike the man are most sure to be true ones. So Ianthé felt

a strong impression that this man would be trustful and faithful. She thought she saw it in his eye, and heard it in the tone of his voice.

“Has the king seen thee of late?” the visitor asked, as soon as he saw that he had secured the maiden’s attention.

“Yes, father. He was here but a short time since.”

“Had he any purpose in coming?”

Ianthe hesitated.

“I ask for thine own good, my child.”

“O, sir!” the poor girl cried, putting forth her folded hands, “I cannot doubt thee; and yet I would know thy mission—why thou hast come, and who thou art.”

“Ianthe, I have come to serve thee; and if thou wilt trust in me thou shalt have help. Thou asketh who I am. Hast ever heard the name, AGRIPPA?”

“AGRIPPA,” repeated the maiden, at first thoughtfully, and then starting with sudden emotion at the idea as the thought came to her mind. “Art thou the one of whom we have heard?”

“What hast thou heard?”

“We have heard of an Agrippa who is a priest of Diana at Abydos, and who has wondrous powers far exceeding the powers of men, and little inferior to the gods.”

“And have ye heard that Agrippa of Abydos was expected here?”

“Yes, father, I have so heard.”

“Then wonder not when I tell thee that I am the priest of Diana, and that I am called Agrippa. I have wondrous powers, as many shall see. I must have exercised them now, or I should not have been here. But be not overawed, nor shrink from me. As true as the temple stands, I will help thee. Now tell me the king’s purpose.”

"He purposes to make me his wife," replied the maiden. She spoke freely, for, with all the awe she naturally felt in the presence of one whose fame was so wondrous, she experienced a degree of confidence which gave her support.

"I thought as much," said Agrippa, taking a seat by the girl's side. "And now," he added, "I wish to know if you have been able to judge why he pursues this course?"

Ianthe thought a few moments, and then answered :

"I cannot judge with any clearness, for he has not been explicit."

"What I wish to arrive at is this : Has he seemed to fear you? Has he shown any sign whereby you would be lead to infer that your appearance had surprised him?"

"Aye, most surely have I," replied the maiden quickly. "On the night when he first beheld my face he appeared like one affrighted ; and his minister, whom he called Donatus was affected in like manner. And he has gazed upon me most strangely since. He declares that Fate has determined that I should be his queen."

"Now I understand it," returned the priest, with a slight nodding of the head. "But be under no apprehensions. He shall not succeed."

"And can you help me?"

"I can—and will."

"You will take me from this place?"

"Not now. Thou wilt be more safe here for the present. Thou wilt be safest here until Pyrrho seeks to consummate his plan ; but that plan shall never be carried out, rest assured."

"Father," said Ianthe, laying her hand upon his arm

with a trembling touch, "dost thou know one Bellerus, a mason?"

"I do."

"Dost know where he is now?"

"Why do you ask?"

"The king says he is dead."

The priest did not answer at once. He bowed his head, and for a little while he seemed to be thinking. Then he raised his eyes to the maiden's face and taking the hand which had rested upon his arm, he said :

"I cannot tell thee where he is. I think the king meant him mortal harm ; and I know he has been within the royal power. But pass as lightly over that thought as thou canst."

"Alas ! then he is dead !" And the stricken girl would have fallen to weeping, had not Agrippa quietly added :

"Let thy thoughts rest upon what thou hast gained, and not upon that which thou hast lost. Think of the love which still surrounds thee, and not of the evil. Raise thine eyes to heaven, where Hope beams yet brightly, and not sink them downward, where Despair clanks its festering chains. I tell thee, Ianthé, these are wondrous times, and thou hast an important part to play. Be hopeful of good ; be pledged to duty ; and trust to heaven for the future !"

Again the maiden was startled by the strange impression that she conversed with one whom she had before known. A dim echo from the priest's tones lingered among the shadowy recollections of by-gone times ; and the light that gleamed from his eyes penetrated to her soul as some other eyelight had done. But these impressions did not prevent her from feeling the force of his words ; and so deeply did she feel it, that the current of her heart was stopped, and her hope

struggled to rise. But she had another question to ask, and her heart was hushed while she waited for the answer.

"You have heard, perhaps, of a youth, named Alaric."

"I have, my child."

"The king says he, too, is dead."

"Then the king has lied to thee."

"Ha ! and does Alaric still live ? Is he alive and well ? O ! tell me !"

"I will tell thee truly, Ianthe. He fled from the city—he gained the country—I know not where he is now, but we hope he is safe."

"It is enough !" ejaculated the fair girl, clasping her hands in gratitude. "If he is safe, I have yet some hope of joy in the future."

"And with this hope to comfort thee, and the assurance of safety I have given thee from the fear of the king, I must leave thee ; for I have business elsewhere."

"But," cried Ianthe, starting up as the priest arose, "I shall not remain here long ?"

"Not many days," replied Agrippa. "But," he added, impressively, "Have faith in what I have told thee, and be assured that thou wilt remain here only so long as thine own good and safety are subserved thereby. Let come what will, know that thou hast friends who not only have the will, but the power, to serve thee. I may see thee again ere long."

With this the priest turned away, and was soon gone. Ianthe had not the power to ask him more, for she was stricken with awe and wonder. As the first startling thrill of rising hope settled to a more calm spirit in her bosom, she could reflect upon the strange circumstances connected with this visit. She sat down and tried to

think where and when she had seen the man before ; but she struggled with her memory in vain. She could dwell upon the palpable impression, as one does upon a by-gone dream, but she could do more. But she would trust him, nevertheless ; and, with all the confidence of her soul, she hung upon the promise he had given her.

CHAPTER XV.

THE KING AND THE ORACLE.

The news was not long in spreading through the city that AGRIPPA, the famed Priest of Diana, of Abydos, was within the walls. His name had long been known and revered, and the people had expected his coming with much anxiety, for it was said that he spoke with the tongue of the gods, and could read all coming things.

By and by it was reported that the great Agrippa was in the temple, and thither large numbers of people flocked ; and when they saw him, they were filled with awe. His long, flowing beard of silvery whiteness had a superhuman appearance of itself ; and then the strange characters upon his sable robe, and the gleaming of his broad, precious belt ; and his deportment of wisdom and authority, all conspired to raise the superstitious wonder of the people to the highest pitch. Many of them pressed forward and consulted him, and he gave them answers which more than surprised them—answers which confirmed them in the faith they had already entertained of his powers.

There was one in Syracuse who heard of Agrippa's

coming with more than ordinary emotion. Pyrrho, the king, received the news, and was much moved thereby. There was much of the future which he would know, and he determined to consult this priest, who, it was said, could read the heavens, and translate all the language of the gods. So he called Claudian, his captain, to him, and bade him go and conduct the wonderful man to the palace. In an hour the captain returned, but Agrippa came not with him.

"Where is the priest?" demanded Pyrrho, when he saw that his messenger had returned alone.

"Sire," replied the captain, "he seemed to deem it an indignity that thou shouldst have sent for him."

"What! will he not come?"

"He says if you would see him, you must come to the temple."

"By Jove, but he is bold and insolent."

"Ah, sire, he hath a wonderful power."

"How? Hast heard any of his sayings, Claudian?"

"Yes. I heard him speak with several; and he read to them the past of their lives as though from a written book. He knows all things."

"And he can read the future?"

"Yes, sire. He reads it as one who speaks from sure knowledge."

"Why will he not come hither?"

"He asked me where the king gave audience. I told him in the palace. Then he bade me tell my master that the Priest of Diana gave audience in Diana's Temple."

"Well, there's reason in it; and I shall seek him. Prepare my retinue, Claudian, and let me know when it is ready."

The captain withdrew, and ere long returned and reported that all was ready. Pyrrho descended to the

court of the palace, and having mounted the horse which had been caparisoned for him, he set forth. When he reached the square of the temple, the heralds went forward and prepared a way for him. At the gate he dismounted and the people fell back as he approached. He found the priest at the altar, and at once addressed him :

“Art thou Agrippa, the priest of Diana of Abydos?”

“I am. And thou art Pyrrho, the king?”

“Yes. I have come to consult thee, and I would crave a private audience.”

“Such I give to all who ask it,” replied Agrippa, resting his hand upon a pedestal, on the top of which was a small statue of Diana. “Speak to me freely, and thou shalt know all that the gods are willing should be communicated.”

“First,” said the king, in a tremulous tone, for he could not yet feel perfect power over himself. “I would ask thee if there be any imminent danger near me.”

“Thou shouldst not need to ask that question of me,” Agrippa replied, almost sternly. “Danger always surrounds a throne, and it is rendered imminent or distant by the acts of the monarch.”

“I know there is danger about me,” said the king.

“So do I,” added the priest.

“And I think it is imminent,” pursued the former.

“I know it is,” responded the latter.

“Ha ! thou knowest ?”

“Yea.”

“And knowest thou its character ?”

“Yes.”

“What is it ?”

“The same as that which threatened many a usurper before thee.”

"How!" cried the king, in anger. "Dost dare to speak thus to me?"

"I must speak truth while I speak; and if thou wouldst hear aught else, thou shouldst have sought some other place than this."

"But there may be words offensive to my ears."

"Not half so offensive as is the thought of the danger thou wouldst avoid," remarked the priest, in a meaning tone.

The king started, and gazed sharply into the old man's face.

"Wert thou ever in Syracuse before?" he asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"When thou wert a child, and since thou wert a man. But I allowed thee this interview not to answer for myself, but for thee. If thou wouldst know of the things that concern thee, ask."

Again the monarch cast his eyes searchingly upon the priest, and gazed as one gazes who seeks to solve some deep problem; but finally he gave up the thought and came back to the subject from which he had wandered in anger.

"I ask thee again—what is the danger which threatens me?"

"A head without a body—a body without a head."

"Death, you mean," whispered Pyrrho.

"Yes."

"And whence comes this danger?"

"From those who have cause to fear you."

"By the heavenly crown, old man, they can be numbered by thousands."

"And thy hope must be in those who love thee!" added Agrippa.

"Ah! men in authority are not apt to be greatly

loved," returned Pyrrho, uneasily. "But a truce to this vague language. Thou knowest the danger, and thou knowest whence it cometh?"

"Aye."

"Then tell me where I may look for it."

"It could not benefit thee to know, king, save that it cometh, as thou hast already spoken, from thousands. I can only tell thee how thou mayest surely avoid it."

"Ha! now thou speakest. Tell me! Now."

"Make thy escape as speedily as possible from Sicily!"

"Out upon thee! Wouldst trifle with me?"

"Nay, not so. I do but speak the truth."

"I know better!" cried the king, forgetting himself in his anger. "Thou dost mock me, old man!"

"Pyrrho," spoke the priest, bending upon the monarch a stern, strange look, "thou speakest as thou actest, with wisdom far from thy thoughts. But there is danger enough to threaten thee already without my punishing thee for thy impious speech. Yet I will open to thee more than thou hast asked for. The net is woven about thee, and the bird which thou hast thought might peck the meshes away cannot help thee."

"Ha!" exclaimed the monarch, with a quick start. "What meanest thou?"

"I see," pursued Agrippa, bowing his head, and pressing his right hand upon his brow, "a fairer star than thine. It arises in thy heaven, and crosses thy course; but in no way can they conjoin. The two must remain separate forever!"

The king forgot his anger in a moment, and gazed upon the speaker with intense eagerness.

"Cannot conjoin," he muttered. "What is this star that follows mine, and will cross its course?"

"It is now swerved from its true course, as though it

would meet and mingle with thine own ; but it cannot be."

"Speak more plainly, I pray thee !" cried the eager monarch. "What of the star? Whose is it?"

"I should say it was a maiden, young and fair ; and she is one whom the gods will protect."

"And does her star of destiny course on toward a throne?" asked Pyrrho in a low, eager whisper.

"Why askest thou that?"

"Because I would know."

"It has a most wondrous course," said the priest, again bowing his head, and speaking as though from revelations that were being gradually made to him.

"What is it? Whither does it lead her?" And as the king asked this, still in a half-hushed whisper, he worked his way to the astrologer.

"'Tis a throne !" said the old man, slowly lifting his head, and gazing into Pyrrho's face.

"And shall she never be mine? never come to me with her destiny?" the monarch asked, now wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement.

"It cannot be," the priest said, emphatically. "The heavens do not lie."

"Never?"

"Never. Wouldst ask more?"

"Not now ! not now," replied the king, speaking huskily and hastily. "I have heard enough." And as he spoke he turned towards the door, which he opened himself.

With quick, long strides the monarch hurried through the great court of the temple, and when he reached his horse he leaped into the saddle at a single bound. He spoke not a word to his attendants, but rode direct to his palace, and sought his private closet ; and having summoned a page, he sent for his chamber-

lain. He paced to and fro like a chafed beast while he was alone, and when his minister came he stopped, and gazed fixedly upon him.

“Donatus,” he finally said, in hurried tones, “whom should I trust if I could not trust thee?”

“Not one in all the world, sire,” answered the chamberlain. He seemed a little uneasy at the king’s strange look, but he spoke freely.

“I wish I could see thy heart, Donatus.”

“Here, sire, is my sword,” readily replied the favorite, at the same time drawing his weapon, and extending the hilt to his master, “and here is my naked bosom. If there can be a wish in thy soul to prove me further than thou hast already done, see how calmly I will give thee my very life in the proof.”

“No, no, put up thy sword. I will not doubt thee. It were foolish in me to do so. But there be not many whom I can trust.”

“I think thy chief officers are all faithful, sire ; and even the soldiers are ready to serve thee.”

“Aye, but how if my power over them were to weaken ? If they saw me falling, and thought they alone could save me, how many would put forth their hands for my salvation ? Aye, how many ? how many ? Ah, Donatus, but few ! but few ! But I will not fall ! I will seize upon the fate while it is in my hands ! I have seen the Priest of Diana—the great Agrippa of Abydos—and he has read what he thinks is my fate. He told me of Ianthé.”

“Ha ! Did he ?”

“Not by name, Donatus, not by name ; but he told me of her so plainly that a child could not have mistaken the sign. He said there was a star—a fair and lovely one—that arose after mine, and would cross my path ; but he said it could never conjoin with mine.

He said 'twas the star of a maiden, young and fair ; and when I asked him if her star of destiny pointed towards a throne, he said it did. Then I asked him if her destiny could never be united with my own, and he said, nay. I asked him again, and he told me never !”

“This is wondrous,” said the chamberlain. “But dost think he reads the stars aright ?”

“I dare not question his power to read,” replied the king. “But,” he added, with a furious stamp of the foot, “I dare question the power of the stars themselves to rule and bind me as they will !”

“Hush, sire !” spoke the minister, trembling with superstitious apprehension. “Thou art daring the power of the heavens !”

“I care not what I dare,” cried the king, still furiously. “I dare assert my own right as monarch of this realm ; and I dare maintain that right even though ten thousand priests of Diana spoke their soothsome edicts against me ! And now, by the scepter of Jove, I’ll marry the maiden this very day—aye, within this very hour ! What thinkest thee of that ?”

“Thou wilt do as it pleases thee,” replied Donatus, trembling.

“And it pleases me that the maiden’s star of destiny shall only meet in my path, and mingle with mine own. All the powers of heaven and earth shall not thwart me now. The priest told me enough. Ianthe’s star points towards a throne, and my danger was, that she would not be mine. But she shall be ! I’ll raise her to the throne—thus fulfill her destiny, and save myself ! Donatus, go thou and call the chief officers of my realm, and bid them attend me in the great throne chamber. Make all haste—let not thy feet rust upon the pavement now.”

When the chamberlain was gone, the king sent for the chief of the eunuchs, and the black slave soon made his appearance.

"Mestor," the monarch said, "How is the lady Ianthe?"

"Well, sire; and seemingly more contented."

"Ah, does she mend in her way of sorrow?"

"Aye, greatly, sire."

"Then perhaps the thought of sharing my throne is not so terrible to her, after all. But, Mestor, go and bid her prepare to meet me; and do thou bring her to me in this room within the next half hour."

"Thou shalt be obeyed, sire."

"Fail not, upon thy life. Conduct her thither, and alone." When the king was once more alone he stamped his foot triumphantly, and strode forth as one who goes to victory.

"Within the hour," he cried, shaking his clenched hand aloft, "I'll prove that the soothing priest, and his stars to boot, can be o'er matched by the Sicilian king!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A FEARFUL PERIL.

Ianthe felt so much confidence in the promise of Agrippa that she had put away much of her fear, though she was far from feeling wholly safe while beneath the roof of the royal palace. She had become so used to the visits of the eunuch that his presence had ceased to frighten her; but when he came in the middle of the afternoon—so much out of his usual time—she was startled. It must be some special business that brought

him, and of course he could come only from the king. She gazed quickly into his face, and she saw, from the expression upon his black features, that he was the bearer of some important matter.

"Lady," he said advancing, and bowing with obsequious reverence, "thou wilt prepare to accompany me to the king."

"Where is he?" she asked, trying not to feel frightened.

"In one of his private apartments."

"And why does he send for me?"

"I know not. I only know that thou art to accompany me thither. So thou wilt prepare as quickly as may be."

"But thou knowest the king's mood."

"He is much as usual, lady, and is anxious to see thee. I would not advise thee to keep him waiting."

The maiden felt a premonition of approaching evil, but she dared not disobey, and she knew that disobedience would be useless, so she made such preparations as her simple opportunities afforded, and then informed the eunuch that she was ready to accompany him. He took her by the hand and led her from the chamber. She shuddered at his touch, and told him she could walk alone, but he said that he must conduct her as seemed best to him, and she made no further opposition. He led her a long distance, through passages that were narrow and dark, and through halls where guards were posted, until finally he stopped before a door near which were two pages. To one of these he spoke, and bade him inform the king that the lady Ianthe was at hand. The messenger disappeared, and quickly returned with an order for the eunuch to proceed. The door was opened—a short passage traversed—another door opened and passed, and Ianthe found herself in the presence of

the monarch. Her conductor withdrew, and she was alone with the man whom she had so much cause to dread. She cast a hurried glance into his face, and as she saw the stern, willful expression which dwelt there, her heart failed her, and she feared the worst.

"Lady," spoke the king, in a subdued tone, but with startling force in his look and bearing, "I have had thee brought hither for a special purpose, a purpose upon which I am fixed. Perhaps thou knowest what it is."

"I know not, sire," she replied faintly.

"I have spoken with thee enough concerning it, so thou canst not be surprised. I have sent for thee to come and be my queen !"

Ianthe had expected this, but still the words fell like a thunderbolt upon her, and she tottered back against the wall.

"Of course thou wert prepared for this," the king continued, as he saw that the maiden did not speak.

"No, no ! I was not ! I cannot be !" she gasped. "You will not—"

"Hold ! I say I will ! Such is my purpose, and it shall be done."

"It cannot be, sire. The very gods will cry out against it."

"Ha ! and hast, then, consulted the gods ? By the fires of Tartarus, thou shalt find that the king of Sicily acknowledges no other will but his own. My queen thou art to be, and that, too, ere another hour has passed. From here I shall take thee to the throne-chamber where the chief officers of my kingdom are assembled, and as thou conductest thyself in their presence, so shall be the cause of my treatment of thee hereafter."

"You will not do this thing."

"I will !"

"But if every emotion and instinct of my soul and of

my nature led me to cry out against it, and to oppose it to the end?"

"And if to all that were added the opposition of Jove himself, I'd carry my purpose to its consummation!"

Ianthe gazed upon the king no longer with a frightened look. His impiousness had opened to her the utter hardness of his heart, and she would not waste breath in calling forth more of it by prayer or petition. She had thrown off the weakening terror which had seized upon her, and came forth with something of the proud spirit which nature had given her. And in this she was influenced no less by an idea of her own welfare, than by the pride of her heart. She saw that she was, for the time, wholly within the tyrant's power, and that, oppose him as she would, nothing could avail her. As she stepped forward from the wall, and bent her gaze upon the foul monarch now, there was a purpose of her own as firmly fixed as any purpose of earth.

"Dost hear what I have said, lady?" the king demanded, as he noticed how thoughtfully she regarded him.

"I have heard thee," she replied, with wondrous calmness.

"And art thou ready to obey?"

"I have spoken as well as thou, sire."

"Aye, but I have spoken with authority and with power."

"And I have spoken with truth, and a fixed purpose."

"If thy purpose is opposed to mine it must yield, lady."

"Beware, king! Thou mayest drag a defenseless maiden to the ceremony of marriage, but the consequences may be such as thou hast not dreamed of."

"I have heard enough of that, girl! If I dare the gods, I shall surely hesitate not for thy soft speech.

Thou hast known my purpose from the first, and by this time I think thou must be prepared. So come—we will to the throne at once, and there thou shalt receive the crown a queen alone can wear.”

“Stop, sire!” the maiden replied, putting forth her hands as the king approached her. “Once more let me warn thee. I say unto thee—seek to carry thy purpose no further, for a greater harm shall come to thee.”

There was something prophetic in the girl’s tone and bearing, and for a moment even the headstrong monarch was startled by it, but he threw off the emotion, and took a step nearer her.

“A threat almost seems sweet coming from those lips,” he said, in a tone of irony; and then he added, with a stern look, “but beware how you go too far! If in the presence of others—in the place to which I shall now conduct thee—thou dost speak such words, thou wilt have cause to wish that thy tongue had been torn out by its roots ere the thought had been born within thee! Dost understand me?”

“I do, sire.”

Again the king was startled, and this time by the strange calmness of the maiden; but he fancied she had resigned herself to her fate, and he felt rather hopeful.

At this juncture a page entered and informed Pyrrho that all the officers who had been found within call were assembled. The monarch then turned to Ianthe and took her hand.

“Come,” he said, “it will soon be done.”

“Art determined?” the maiden asked.

“As fixed as the walls of my palace,” was the response.

She made no opinion further, but suffered the king to lead her away, and ere long she found herself within the great chamber of the throne. She saw black slaves at

the doors, and near the center of the apartment stood those whom she knew must be the chief officers of the kingdom. For a few moments her heart seemed to hush its pulsations, and she came very nigh to sinking beneath the whelming emotions ; but she remembered the purpose of her soul, and with a mighty effort, she called back her departing energies. She was led to the marble dais in front of the throne, and the king stood by her side.

“Donatus,” he said, addressing his chamberlain, “it is my command that you cause the object of our will to be made known.”

Then the chamberlain turned and addressed the chief of the heralds, and the herald stepped forth and raised his trumpet to command attention. Then he made known to all assembled that it was the will and pleasure of their sovereign majesty that the lady Ianthe, now present, should be made queen, and raised to a seat upon the throne, to enjoy, while she lived, all the right and dignity of a king’s wife. Whereupon the grand chamberlain approached the monarch and announced that his order had been obeyed.

Then Pyrrho led Ianthe to the throne, and upon her brow he placed a crown of gold, and while he held her by the hand, he spake to his officers.

“Men of Sicily, thus do I take this woman to be my true wife, and by this act do I acknowledge her my queen. Henceforth let all men so regard and respect her.”

Then the herald stepped forth again, and this time he blew a blast upon his trumpet, after which he proclaimed that the king’s marriage had been consummated, and that Ianthe was queen.

The maiden heard the last word of the herald, and then she tottered back, and sank down upon the seat

of gold and ivory. The king ordered the chamber to be cleared at once of all save his black slaves, and when the officers were gone, he turned to his new-made wife, who was pale as death, but who yet breathed and had life.

"Ianthé," he said, taking her hand, "thou art deeply affected."

She heard the voice and it startled her back to consciousness.

"Art faint?" Pyrrho asked, as he saw her eyes open.

She gazed up into his face, and in a moment more started to her feet.

"King!" she whispered, putting him from her by a powerful effort of strength, "touch me not! I am not thy queen! It is all a base, impious play, and I hold myself free from its obligations. As you love justice and fear retribution, come not near me!"

"Ah, pretty one, it is too late for thee to wail or to threaten now. The consummation has been arrived at, and thou art all I could ask thee to be. Mestor!"

The chief of the eunuchs advanced to the throne, and bowed low before it.

"Take this lady to the place from whence thou didst bring her, and be thou responsible as before." Then the king turned to Ianthe, and in a lower tone he added:

"Thy future is now in thine own hands, either for good or for ill. If thou hast sense or reason within thee, thou wilt know how to conduct thyself, for I do assure thee that I can brook none of thine insolence or contumacy. But I trust that a little reflection will calm thee somewhat, and bring thee back to reason. Now go, and I will be with thee when it pleases me."

Ianthé allowed the eunuch to take her hand, this time without even a shudder at the thought, for she was thus

relieved of a presence far more terrible. She was led back to her own chamber, and when Mestor had seen her seated upon a couch, and knew that she wanted nothing which he could provide, he left her to herself.

For nearly an hour the afflicted girl remained like one in a fearful dream. The bands had been drawn to their utmost tension, and she felt their force notwithstanding the promise of the priest, and the resolution she had herself taken. When it was fairly dark the eunuch brought lights and refreshments, and was about to depart when Ianthe stopped him.

“Your royal master will come here to-night?” she said.

“If he said so, then he will,” replied the black.

“When will he come?”

“I know not; but thou hadst better be prepared to receive him at any time.”

When the slave was gone Ianthe partook of such refreshment as she needed, and then arose from the board. She took a few turns up and down the room, and finally stopped by the window through which the rays of the new moon were shining. She threw open the casement and gazed out. She could not see the pavement below, for no light penetrated to the bottom of the narrow court, into which she looked; but she knew that she was a long distance from the ground, for she had gazed from the dizzy height in the day time. When she saw that the casement was fastened back, she broke away the vines that had been trailed about the window and then returned to her couch.

An hour more passed away, and part of another, and at the end of that time she heard some one approaching her door. It was not the eunuch's step—she had heard that too often to be mistaken. She hushed the wild throbbing of her heart, and started to her feet just as the door opened.

“Ah, not yet retired?” said the king, closing the door behind him.

“Hold! one moment,” spoke Ianthe, in a hollow, startling tone.

The monarch stopped, moved as much by the maiden’s strange look and bearing, as by her words.

“What would ye?” he asked, gazing in wonder upon her. She looked very beautiful as she stood there; and she looked queenly, too.

“Come no nearer to me!” she said, in the same deep tone.

“Why, how is this? Dost mock me?”

“I mock thee not; but I saw, come no nearer!”

“Art thou not my wife?”

“I am not.”

“By Jove! thou art.”

“I am not.”

“Thou art my queen and my wife.”

“I am not! I will never be! Touch me not!”

“Now, by the heavens, but this is jesting too far,” cried the king, partly in anger. “I should act the fool in downright earnest to suffer thee thus to guile me. No, no, I’ll clasp thee to my bosom, and love thee if thou wilt let me.”

With a quick movement, and before Pyrrho could divine her purpose, the maiden leaped upon the sill of the high window, and stood upon the projecting stone.

“Behold, O king!” she exclaimed, “I now have the power to escape thee! Ere I will suffer the slightest touch from thee I will throw myself from this fearful height upon the solid pavement beneath!”

The monarch started back aghast. At first it appeared to him that she would go over the sill; but when he saw her standing there erect, her fair form boldly relieved in the moonlight, and her hands clasped

upon her heaving bosom, he was inspired by a feeling of momentary awe. He soon came down to a practical view of the matter, and began to wonder if she was really in earnest.

"Ianthé," he said, "thou wouldst not do so foolish a thing."

"As well as that thou shouldst do so wicked a thing," she quickly responded. "Approach me another step and I go! I tell thee, I have counted the cost—I had counted it when thou didst behold me so calm in thy closet—and I am resolved. If my bruised and mangled body can benefit thee, thou canst have it; but not one of thy fingers shall be laid upon me."

The king had sense enough to see that she was resolute, and he promised her, if she would come in from the place of danger, that he would after that retire if she still demanded it.

"I would not trust thee, foul king!" she replied, "Get thee hence from my apartment, and send to me attendants of my own sex, if thou wouldst have me come down."

"I'll have thee, girl, if it costs—"

"Ha! Beware! If thou takest that step I will throw myself down!"

"Then if thou wilt have it so," returned the king, stamping his foot in rage, "so let it be. If I cannot have thee living, I'll have thee dead; for even thus I shall be the gainer!"

"Sayest thou so?" asked Ianthe, clasping her hands more tightly together.

"Aye, and I mean it!"

"Then, farewell to thee and to earth! Thou hast but to take the step, king!"

"I'd rather have thee living," said Pyrrho, hesitating; "for thou art my queen—and thou art most beautiful."

“ I have spoken. Between thy next step towards this place and my death is but the time of passage hence to the pavement !”

“ Then thou wilt die !”

“ Take the step and see !”

“ By the thunders of Jupiter, I’ll try thee !”

The mad monarch was upon the point of advancing, and the maiden was upon the point of leaping from her dizzy perch, when the door was suddenly opened. The king gave utterance to a deep curse, while from Ianthe’s lips burst a cry of hope ; for ’twas AGRIPPA who had thus appeared upon the scene !

CHAPTER XVII.

DEEPER TROUBLE FOR THE KING.

Ianthe had already balanced herself for the fearful leap when she was so suddenly and unexpectedly turned from her purpose, and in a moment more she would have left the world of mortality behind her ; but she started back towards the window when she saw the priest, and her desire to live returned to her. The king had been resolved upon pushing her to the utter extremity ; for beneath the influence of a mad passion, he had planned that she should die if she voluntarily sought it. He would have saved her—saved her for himself—if he could have grasped her in season to thwart her fatal purpose ; but he would not give up to her, he would not bend one atom from his own will, though she sought a thousand deaths. His foot had already been raised when he heard the door open behind

him ; and when he saw the priest he started back as though a thunderbolt had broken at his feet.

“ Who—what—is this ? ” he gasped, in choking tones, glaring upon the intruder like a wild beast.

But Agrippa did not seem to notice him. He had seen the perilous position of Ianthe, and he appeared to comprehend its meaning in a moment, for he uttered a quick cry of alarm, and started towards her.

“ Ianthe ! ” he called, “ Ianthe, fear not. I have come to save thee.”

The maiden tottered toward him, and would have fallen from the window-sill upon the floor had he not caught her in his arms, for this sudden transition from darkest despair to the hope of joyful safety, had proved too much for her already overtaxed heart. He bore her to a couch, and then turned to the king, who had not yet recovered from his first emotions of astoundment.

“ King of Sicily,” he said, bending upon the monarch a stern look, “ It was made known to me, even upon the consummation, that thou hadst forced this maiden to assume the crown of thy queen, and I have come to save her from the fate which thou hast planned in opposition to the will of heaven. Did I not tell thee that this thing could never be ? ”

For a while Pyrrho was absolutely at a loss for language to express himself. His madness was so rampant, and his passion so overpowering, that he was completely mastered thereby. But he managed finally to find his tongue.

“ Thou creeping, canting trickster ! ” he yelled, with a furious stamp of the foot, “ thou abomination of all truth, and blot upon holiness ! How darest thou come unbidden ? ”

“ I dare do anything which is right,” the priest replied. “ And so I dare thwart thee in thy foul purpose ! ”

"By the powers of the celestial gods!" cried the king, bringing his clenched fists together, "thou shalt not live to repeat thy insolence. Wert thou ten thousand times a priest of Diana, thy life should answer for such daring treason as this! What ho! Guards! Without there!"

"Your majesty forgets that the guards are not posted in this far-off part of the palace," remarked Agrippa.

"The gods infernal seize thee—thou speakest well for one who will speak but little more! What ho! Without there! Mestor!"

"I did not see the slave as I came in," quietly interposed the priest. "I think he has left thee to thyself."

The king remembered that he had called for no attendance at the door, for he had not thought it necessary; and as this recollection came to him, he clapped his hand upon his hip and drew his sword.

"By the crown of Jupiter!" he exclaimed, "there is one who can come at my bidding, and thou shalt find that the king is not to be caught powerless. But, before I kill thee, let me thank thee for coming hither; for thou hast served me two purposes. Thou hast given thyself into my hands, and thou hast saved the maiden to me. Now, base-born wretch, take the reward of thy treachery and insolence!"

In a moment the long black robe of the priest was thrown back, revealing for a single instant a closely fitting garb of finely wrought mail, the intricate meshes of which glittered like burnished silver, and when the robe fell again about his form, he held in his hand a sword, the long, broad blade of which shone like a mirror.

"Ha!" shouted the king, as he saw the movement, "Wouldst draw upon thine anointed ruler?"

"I would have free passage hence, and bear the maiden with me," replied Agrippa.

"Why, thou crazy, slack-brained idiot! Down with thy sword!"

"Put up thine own."

"I'll put it thus!" yelled Pyrrho, making a rush at the priest. But he missed his mark; and when he stopped he seemed to consider. He gazed upon the man before him, and he calculated that he could easily overcome one so old and apparently infirm; and if he could dispatch him thus, and thus be rid of his influence, it might be the best thing he could do.

The monarch was superstitious, but he was moved by a deep frenzy now, and he only thought of the present. So he quickly made up his mind that he would despatch the intruder upon the spot.

"Base worm," he cried, between his clenched teeth, "thus I do put thee from my path!"

He made a furious thrust as he spoke, and he was not a little surprised to find that his sword was turned aside without any apparent effort on the part of his antagonist. But that might have been a mere chance ward; he drew back and thrust again. But again his point flew off into empty space, gliding along upon the priest's smooth blade instead of through his body.

"Thou canst not harm me, king," said the old man, as Pyrrho recovered himself.

At another time the monarch might have been moved by a superstitious dread of the astrologer's mystic power, but he was too deeply excited now. He had been a soldier in his day, and had fought many a hard battle; and though his course for the past few years had made a coward of his heart, yet the clang of arms, and the opposition of an enemy who stood him face to

face, gave him brute courage enough. In his mad passion he again gathered himself for the attack, determined not to be thwarted again by a white-haired priest. He made another thrust, and when that was parried, as he had calculated, he quickly recovered his point, and lunged out in another direction. But this blow was ward off again, and now he aimed a furious stroke at his opponent's head, which was also rendered of no avail by the quick movements of Agrippa.

The king must by this time have seen that the priest was a man of extraordinary physical power, as well as a cunning swordsman, but he did not seem to realize that he stood in any danger. He did not seem to consider that the power which so easily kept him at bay, might, when turned upon the offensive, prove quickly fatal to him. He was growing more blind with madness, and he refused to see. Again he set upon the old man, this time cutting and thrusting by turns, and still he was foiled at every point.

"By the gods, thou shalt die!" the monarch yelled, with a lunge, to the giving of which he had concentrated all his power.

Agrippa turned Pyrrho's point aside, and, as the monarch plunged forward, he dealt him a blow upon the head with the golden pommel of his sword which laid him senseless upon the marble floor. The priest quickly threw his weapon down, and kneeling by the side of the prostrate king, he at once proceeded to secure him from giving any immediate alarm. He bound his hands behind him; then lashed his feet, and then wound a scarf about his mouth. When this was done he went to the couch, and found that Ianthé had recovered her senses, and was sitting up.

"Is the king dead?" she asked, with a shudder.

"No; he is only stunned. I would not kill him now,

for thus I should rob fate of her just due. But what of it hast thou seen?"

"I saw the king fall. I think I heard him cry out that thou shouldst die. It was then that I awoke."

"He thought to kill me very easily," said the old man, with a curious nod of the head; "and thus, as he confessed, not only rid himself of me, but secure yourself. However, he little dreamed with whom he had to do. Still, I am somewhat sorry that I met the king here, for I had not anticipated it. I heard of his base treatment of thee—that he had forced the crown upon thy head, and I came hither as quickly as possible that I might save thee from the full consummation of his fell purpose. I hoped to find thee here alone, and get thee hence without being seen; but when I reached the door, and heard the sound of the king's voice, I knew there was danger, and I determined to brave the result. Here, thy hand. Now let hope give thee strength, and fear nothing while I am with thee."

The maiden had no thought of hesitation now; but she put forth her hand with all the trust of a child in its parent, and walked by the old man's side. They saw that the king had returned to consciousness, and that he was struggling against the bonds that confined him; but they stopped not to witness his labors. Agrippa opened the door and passed out, and at the end of the long corridor they came upon a man who held a lantern in his hand. Ianthe would have hesitated with fear, but her conductor informed her that the man was a friend, and that he had more within the palace upon whom he could call in case of need.

The person upon whom they had thus come did not speak, but simply turned as they reached the place where he stood, and walked on ahead of them. And there was need of his lantern too; for they soon entered

a narrow, dark way, which had evidently been constructed only for a passage. In a little while they began to descend a long flight of narrow, winding steps, and when they had reached the bottom of these they came upon a second man, who likewise held a lantern in his hand, and who now took the lead. From the feeling of the atmosphere, Ianthe judged that she was now in some subterranean place, and she asked her companion if such was not the case.

"We are below the ground floor of the palace," he answered, "though very far from the lowest of this structure. You are not afraid?"

"No, father. If thou canst prove false to me, then my heart is false to itself."

"I thank thee, lady. But we shall soon be free from the palace entirely. We are now in the passage which runs along by the butler's store-rooms. There is a private gate not far off."

In a little while they came to a stout door, which the man with the lantern opened by means of a key. Beyond this was a narrow hall, from which opened several doors, but the guide opened that one which seemed the strongest, immediately beyond which was another of solid metal. This was opened by removing several heavy bars, and when it was finally swung open, Ianthe felt the cool, fresh air strike upon her cheek. With a quicker step and a quicker throbbing of the heart, she moved forward, and in a few moments more she stood in the open street. Agrippa threw a light cloak over her shoulders—one which he had received from the last guide—and then he hurried along until they had got well away from the palace.

It was not very late, and there were some people in the street, but the priest seemed to have no fears, for as soon as he had got away from the royal abode he walked

quite leisurely, like one in deep meditation, and seemed not to notice the remarks which his appearance called forth. Ere long, however, quite a crowd had collected behind him, for many had recognized him as the wondrous priest of the oracle, and when they began to press upon him, he stopped and turned towards them.

“My children,” he said, “It is not meet that I should be disturbed. I am contemplating upon matters which I may resolve for your benefit if you will but suffer me to pass on in peace. May the blessings of the heavenly God be upon thee, and deliver thee from all evil !”

A murmur of thanks went up from the multitude, and then they dispersed quietly and in order, and the old man pursued his way in peace.

Finally he turned into a narrow court, and shortly afterwards entered a house, at the door of which stood two men. A long, erratic course was now pursued, amid a labyrinth of passages, which would have puzzled any one not perfectly familiar with them, and in the end Ianthe found herself in a well-furnished and well-lighted chamber, and about her stood many of those who had been her friends for years. She saw them all, she saw how kindly they gazed upon her, but her heart yearned most strongly towards one well-remembered form—Endora, the sister of Bellerus, who had been her nurse and her faithful friend. Upon the bosom of Endora she sank ; and as the aged matron smoothed back her tangled tresses, and kissed her fair brow, the men withdrew, and left the recovered jewel in the charge of those who might, for the present, handle it with the most care and circumspection.

* * * * *

It was not until near morning that Mestor repaired to the chamber which the maiden had occupied, and found

his royal master bound hand and foot, and his power of speech cut off. As soon as the monarch was freed from his bonds, he flew into a passion with his eunuch for having left him to suffer so long ; but he finally cooled away from that, and allowed Mestor to take him to the bath, and wash and rub him until the impeded circulation was restored. From this till the time for assembling of the officers, the king was like one in a state of maniacy. He raved and swore, and threatened with death every officer of his household ; but this paroxysm finally left him, and he made his appearance in the closet where he usually met his chief officers, with a terrible calmness upon him, a calmness such as only the most intense feeling can create. He made no explanations—not even to his chamberlain—but he turned to his captain, and bade him listen.

“Go to the Temple of Diana,” he said, “and bring me the priest of Abydos, whose name is Agrippa. If he is not there, find him. If it requires every soldier in the city to effect the capture, they are at thy command. But—BRING HIM TO ME !”

The captain left the room, and then the monarch clenched his hands and teeth, and paced to and fro in his impotent rage. Donatus dared not speak to him, so he stood apart, and wondered what had happened. At the end of an hour the captain returned.

“Hast brought him ?” the king demanded.

“No, sire,” replied the officer, tremblingly.

“Couldst thou not find him ?”

“Aye, he was at the temple.”

“Then why, in the name of all the gods, didst thou not bring him ?”

“Sire,” replied Claudian, “I could not do it. The moment I mentioned the subject to the priest, he turned, and, with a loud voice, cried out that he could

not yield himself a prisoner to a tyrant whom he had offended only in that he had dared to tell the truth and do an act of mercy. And then he intimated that he could tell the people something which would startle them. I supposed he alluded to the secret of the Lady Ianthe, and I dared not push him to further speech."

"But why didst thou not strike the white-haired traitor dead?" yelled the tyrant, stamping his foot.

"Why, sire, the people took up his cause in a moment and they would have torn me limb from limb had I attempted to approach the sacred altar where he stood. They reverence and adore him already, for he has spoken words of strange cheer to them."

"Where were the soldiers?"

"Wouldst thou have me lead the soldiers against the people, sire?"

"Aye! by the death, I would! If the people protect an outlawed traitor, let your soldiers disperse them."

"But, sire—"

"Out with it! Stand not there as though thy words would kill! By the hosts of Tartarus, but I've borne enough to bear all thou canst tell! Speak!"

"The soldiers might not be safely led."

"Ha! Does treason stalm them, too?"

"No, sire. But I can feel the beatings of the pulse of our guard, and 'twould not be safe to set them against the people, especially at this time. Let this old priest of Diana go till thou canst fasten him by some stratagem, for the people and the soldiers both have too great a reverence for the temple, and its sacred power of oracle, to allow even the officers of the king to tread violently therein."

"I'll not wait!" the monarch madly shouted, gnashing his teeth with fury. "Get thee hence, and

leave me to myself awhile, for I cannot think while I am gazed upon. But go not from the sound of my voice."

And when the king was left alone he strode up and down the apartment, raving and pondering by turns. Could he not contrive some way to bring Agrippa to the palace, and, when once there, lead him to the mystic fatal vault? Thus ran the monarch's thoughts, and to the perplexing solution he applied all his energies.

CHAPTER XV

A COMPACT ; AND—!

Alaric had seen too many seasons of trial, and passed through too many severe mental ordeals, to suffer himself to remain long in despair under the new trial which had come upon him. As soon as he was able to mingle with the laborers, he learned that the captain who had brought him to Carthage took prisoners wherever he could find them, and sold them as slaves. He was a pirate, and stole both cargo and crew ; and he had many customers among the wealthy vine-growers and husbandmen upon the coast.

"I paid but very little for you," said the purse-proud, haughty Torus, as he came to see if the young man was able to go into the vineyard one morning ; "and even that I did not pay until I was sure you would recover ; so I won't force you to very hard work until you are able to bear it. The captain told me he found you lying upon the sea-shore, near the city of Syracuse, and

that not far distant from you were some dead soldiers. What were you in that city ?”

“Nothing,” replied Alaric. “I was only a poor traveler. I had no home.”

“Then you should thank your stars that you have a home now.”

“I shall suffer no more here than I might have suffered elsewhere, sir.”

“Suffer? My bondmen do not suffer. Conduct thyself as becometh one in thy station, and thou shalt find much comfort.”

Alaric went into the vineyard, and he worked for his master ; but when he gazed off upon the blue sea he felt his soul in his arms, and the struggle came on ; but he conquered it, and kept his peace. It might have been fate that had brought him there—for he seemed thus far to have been borne through life by powers beyond his own control—but might not fate deliver him from the bondage? He hoped so, and in the hope he resolved to work, keeping his own counsel, and watching opportunities as they might offer. He found himself surrounded by a coarse, ignorant set of men, who not only wore the yoke without murmuring, but who seemed fitted for just the stations they occupied. Most of them had been sailors and poor fishermen, and appeared to have no realization of any good above a covered back and a well-filled stomach.

One day, while Alaric was at work upon the slope of a hill that faced the sea, he saw a vessel approaching the coast ; and when she had come near enough so that he could distinguish her character, he knew her to be a craft from Syracuse. He could tell by her model, and by the peculiar arrangement of her sails, and also by the manner in which her long banks of oars, or sweeps, were placed. When she came close to the shore she

dropped her anchor, and a boat was lowered, in which some men came to the landing, and two of them ascended to the vine-grower's dwelling. The youth thought they might be merchants from Syracuse, and he wondered if he should know them if he should see them.

In the meantime the two strangers, who had come from the ship, were admitted to the master's apartment, where they found Torus engaged with a scribe, who was making accounts of wine ready to sell.

"Art thou the master of this place?" asked one of the new-comers.

"I am," replied Torus, and as he spoke he handed seats for his guests.

"We would see thee alone," resumed the visitor.

The scribe was ordered to withdraw, and when he was gone the men took the proffered seats.

"My name is Flavius," said the stranger who had before spoken, "and I come from Pyrrho, King of Sicily, with a message to Torus."

"Ah," returned the master with a brightening eye at this mention of a wealthy monarch; for he was an avaricious man, and gold was his god. "I hope the good king is well. His majesty has tasted of my wine ere this, or I am mistaken."

"He has, and he would taste of it again, for he has found it of most excellent flavor."

"I'll show thee some of a new cast, sirs; and thou shalt say if Sicily can produce a better."

Thus speaking the master arose and stepped from the apartment, and as soon as he was gone Flavius turned to his companion.

"Zared," he said, "this man is vain, and proud, and avaricious. We must humor him."

"Aye," answered Zared, "I see that plainly. Let us order wine of him upon the king's professed partiality

for his particular vintage, and we may have him to our purpose more easily."

"Wait, here he comes."

Torus returned, and behind him followed a black slave, bearing a large tray upon which were a flagon of silver and several drinking-cups. Wine was poured out, and the guests supplied.

"What think ye of that?" asked the master, as his visitors lowered their cups.

"It is superb," pronounced Flavius.

"The finest wine I ever tasted," responded Zared.

"If Jupiter sips nectar like this he must be content," added Flavius.

"The king must taste of your wondrous production, good Torus," cried Zared, emptying his cup.

"You came to buy wine, then?" said the delighted vine-grower.

"Partly," replied Flavius, after a moment's thought. "We came on some business of State, and, as we were preparing, the king asked us if we knew where the valley of the vineyard of Torus was. We informed him that we could easily find so noted a place, and he bade us stop there and purchase some wine for him; for, notwithstanding the old feuds which have existed between the two countries, he declares his preference for the Punic wines."

"I shall be most happy to serve him, I assure you," returned Torus, rubbing his hands with much satisfaction. "My largest leathern bottle holds four measures. I can spare a number such of the very wine you have tasted."

"We will make a selection before we go," said Flavius.

The two Sicilians drank some more of the wine, and

chatted upon various topics connected with vine culture and finally Flavius remarked :

“We mentioned that we came from Syracuse partly on business of State.”

“Yes, I remember,” replied the master, with attention.

“There has been a horrid conspiracy against the king,” pursued Flavius ; “and the chief conspirator has escaped from the island.”

“Ah, a conspiracy?”

“Yes, a fearful one.”

“And a conspirator escaped?”

“*The* conspirator,” said Flavius. “He would have murdered the monarch.”

“Do you know who he is?” asked the master, who now manifested a deep interest.

“Not exactly,” returned the messenger with some hesitation ; “but we have had information that he was taken away from Sicily by a ship of Carthage, and brought upon this coast.”

“Ha ! And how left he the island ? Did he slay any soldiers ?”

“Yes, he and his associates slew four of them ; and he must have been himself seriously wounded. The strange soldiers were seen bearing him off to their boat, and pursuit was given ; but they got safely off.”

“By the sacred Tartarus,” cried the master, “methinks the king of Sicily could afford to pay something for this conspirator.”

The two Sicilians exchanged glances.

“He would—he will—pay handsomely,” said Zared ; “though he would not have the wretch brought back alive to Syracuse.”

“What—how much—would he give ?” inquired Torus, working his hands together slowly and calculatingly.

“For his dead body, presented to us, we are authorized to pay five hundred pieces of gold, of the Roman coin.”

“Five hundred pieces,” repeated the master, musingly. “It is a goodly sum. But you have not mentioned the name of this conspirator.”

“His name was Alaric, and he was a youth who had seen the passing of not more than twenty years.”

“This is a strange coincidence, gentlemen,” returned Torus, folding his hands upon his knees, and seeming still to calculate. “The youth of whom you speak is my bondman.”

The visitors started as though they were astonished.

“I purchased him of a strange captain, and I not only paid a round sum for him, but I have been at much expense in curing him of a very dangerous wound which had brought him nigh unto death. But I did all this willingly, for I saw that he had much intelligence, and I knew he would be of great value to me. He reads and writes far better than any scribe I have, and understands many languages.”

“By the fates, we are most fortunate,” cried Flavius. “Of course we can make some arrangement with you?”

“Why—as for that matter—I shall not refuse such a favor to my friend, the king of Sicily, providing I can be sufficiently recompensed. If I understand you rightly, you wish for his dead body?”

“So the king commanded us.”

“Would not some of your own men slay him?”

“We would rather not trust them. They would do it, but we do not wish the fact that he so died to be made public in Syracuse; and we cannot be answerable for the tongues of the sailors, nor of the few guardmen whom we have brought with us. But he is an outlawed traitor and conspirator, and as such deserves death at

the hands of all honorable men. Have you not slaves who would be his executioners?"

"I have slaves who will perform whatever I command them. But first, I would have you see this youth, and be perfectly sure that he is the culprit."

Upon this the master led his guests out into the vineyard, and conducted them to a point from whence they could observe the bondman without being seen by him in turn. They knew him in an instant, and so informed Torus. After this they returned to the house, and the Carthaginian seemed to have well considered the matter. He cared little for the life or death of a bondman. The laws of Carthage made him absolute master over his household, and irresponsible to any tribunal of the land. He saw in the men about him only so much money which they might yield him, and he realized nothing of duty towards them beyond that. He had told the truth when he said that he had been careful of Alaric, because he thought he would be valuable to him as a scribe and general business agent; but since the youth had been able to work he had begun to entertain doubts about the feasibility of thus employing him, for the young bondman did not display a disposition to be useful, but rather seemed inclined to stubbornness. And Torus had strong suspicions, too, that he might escape him one of these days. So, on the whole, if he could realize a sum greater than any possible profit which could accrue from Alaric's labor for a lifetime, he had better dispose of him to the excellent advantage thus offered. And then, again, the master considered that the youth's life was his in fact, as well as in law, for he had verily saved it.

"Gentlemen," he said, in the tone of one who has made up his mind, and will abide the consequences, "I have reflected upon this subject, and have made proper

calculation ; and I am ready to make known my proposition."

"Let us have it," returned Flavius, eagerly.

"For one thousand pieces of gold, of full weight, I will give to you the body of the bondman Alaric."

"You will take his life?" said Zared.

"Of course, for such I conceive to be the contract."

"We accept the offer, good sir ; and the gold shall be paid to you when you demand it. And the sooner the thing is consummated, the better."

"It shall be done this very night," replied the master, "and before you sleep you shall see the dead body."

After this Torus ordered refreshments, and the current of conversation was changed.

* * * * *

Alaric had eaten his supper, and stood by an open door gazing out upon the placid sea, within the bosom of which rested the reflection of the starry heavens. He had caught a glimpse of the two strangers who had come up from the ship, and one of them he recognized as Flavius, a favorite of the Sicilian tyrant, belonging to the executive department. He wondered if this officer knew of his whereabouts. If he did, then his mission was not to be mistaken. Perhaps they knew where he was, and had come to take him back to Syracuse.

He stood pondering thus, when he heard a step behind him, and felt a heavy hand upon his shoulder. He turned with a sudden start, and beheld Alkanor. He had no difficulty in recognizing the towering form, for no other man in the vineyard possessed such a frame of size and strength. And Alaric could see the man's features, too, for the twilight still lingered upon the vale, and even distant objects were visible in outline. The

youth had heard the story of the one who had thus approached him, and he knew something of his character.

Alkanor was an Egyptian by birth, and had been a bondman in Carthage for many years. First he was owned by a high officer within the city, who was cruel and tyrannical ; but finally he fell into the hands of Torus, who soon made a freedman of him. The vine-grower found the new slave to be stern and resolute, though crushed by long bondage, and he thought he could make a better use of him to free him, than he could to keep the yoke upon him. So he made him a freedman, and gave him control of all the slaves while not at work. The last spark of humanity seemed crushed out from the Egyptian's bosom, and he carried his sway with an unrelenting hand. His Herculean power made him an object of dread to the workmen, and at his slightest nod they sank into submission. And he executed punishment also, when the decree was passed, and no sympathy ever held back his giant arm from the blow.

“Come with me !” pronounced Alkanor.

“Wherefore ?” asked Alaric, gazing up into the freedman's dark face.

“Ask me no questions, but come,” was the response ; and thus saying the Egyptian took him by the arm and led him away.

The youth might as well have resisted the tornado, or the lightning bolt, as to have offered resistance to that man ; for his frame had not wholly recovered its wonted strength, and he had no weapon. He was led to the rear of the buildings, where two stout Ethiops, whom our hero recognized as body servants of the master, joined them. Their faces were black as night, and they showed their glistening teeth like beasts of prey as they

gazed upon the youth. They wore swords, and 'twas said they knew how to use them.

Up through the valley strode Alkanor, with his grasp still upon the youth's arm, and close behind followed the Ethiopians. The end was reached, and they stood within a deep ravine, where a few olive trees struggled up through the rocks.

"What now?" asked Alaric in a hoarse whisper.

But the Egyptian answered not in words. He forced the youth's arms behind him, as he would have forced the arms of a child, and bound them there with a stout thong of leather.

"Answer me one word!" cried the sufferer, turning an imploring glance upon the gigantic freedman. "Am I to die thus? O! speak, if only to tell me that!"

But Alkanor would not speak. He placed the bound youth against a huge fragment of rock, and then turned to the Ethiops, who had drawn their swords, and seemed waiting for some signal from him. Alaric saw them—and saw their bright blades of steel flashing back the star-beams. He could not see their black faces clearly; but he could see their grinning, horrid teeth, gleaming in their pure whiteness like the teeth of tigers!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MYSTIC TEST, AND ITS RESULT.

As soon as Alaric saw the drawn swords of the Ethiops, the whole truth flashed upon him. He knew that his death-warrant had come from Syracuse, and that Flavius and his companion had brought it. Where would he look for help now? Not to the Egyptian, for

he had no mercy ; and surely not to the two slaves, for they knew nothing save the will of their masters. With this certainty of death before him, and no earthly hope of succor, he instinctively turned his thoughts to that Omnipotent One of whom he had so lately learned. He saw the blacks advancing with their bright blades ready for his blood, and, with his eyes raised towards the starry heavens, so that he might not see them when they struck, he cried, with a loud voice :

“O, Lord God ! Thou great Jehovah ! Take me, the youngest of thy craftsmen, to Thyself, in that celestial Temple which Thou hast reared !”

He heard the step of the slaves—he could hear their deep breathing, but they did not strike. The words he had spoken had scarcely passed his lips, when the swords of the Ethiops were stricken down, and upon opening his eyes, which he had closed in expectation of the death-stroke, he found Alkanor again by his side.

“Bondman—Sicilian,” spoke the Egyptian, in a tone so different from any the youth had before heard from his lips, that it seemed a new man, “What knowest thou of the *Lora God Jehovah* ?”

Alaric was too much startled by the suddenness of the movement, and by the strangeness of the question, to give an immediate answer. But finally he said :

“He is the ONE in whom I put my trust.”

“Aye,” pursued Alkanor, eagerly ; “but where didst thou learn of him ?”

A sudden gleam of hope, like the flashing of a meteor, darted before the bound youth ; and he quickly replied :

“Where all who are duly and truly prepared may learn of Him !”

“And what preparation is that which is necessary ?”

“A preparation of heart and of understanding.”

“Whence comest thou?” asked the Egyptian, becoming more eager and excited.

“From the East,” answered Alaric, whose meteor hope was taking a more radiant promise.

“And from whom in the East?”

“From Solomon, King of Israel.”

“Didst learn a lesson of Fortitude there?”

“Yes.”

“Of whom?”

“The Widow’s Son.”

As Alaric gave this answer, Alkanor turned to the two black slaves, and demanded of them their swords. They seemed to wonder much at this movement, but they dared not disobey.

“Now step one side,” he continued in a stern, authoritative voice, “and await my bidding.”

“But why take our weapons?” asked one of them.

“So that I may slay ye both if ye dare to disobey me! Now stand back and await my bidding.”

As soon as the slaves were out of ear-shot, Alkanor turned again to the youth, and with one of the sharp swords he cut the thongs that bound his arms.

“Now give me thy hand,” he said.

Alaric did as requested. He grasped the Egyptian’s broad palm, and as he did so he gave a secret token which he had received in the mystic chambers beneath the temple. Alkanor recognized it at once, for he not only returned it, but he also gave another, which the youth returned in like manner.

“Now,” spoke the giant freedman, “if thou couldst give me the word.”

“Wert thou prepared to receive it, I could do so readily,” replied Alaric.

“Then behold me prepared, from my foot to my mouth.”

And with their breasts laid together, and their arms wound about each other, in token of their brotherhood and their fidelity, Alaric whispered into his ear the same mystic WORD which Artabanus had once whispered into his ear.

“MY BROTHER !” pronounced the Egyptian, holding the youth by the hands, “how sacredly does the memory of by-gone times return to me. Once, in my own land, I learned all this. My father was a craftsman in Thebes, and of him I learned to be a cunning workman in stone ere I was old enough to receive the wages of corn, wine and oil. But I was old enough at length, and became inducted to all of the mysteries of the craft, such as they had maintained since the days of the great Soloman—the Wise Man of the East. I was yet young when my father, with others of like calling, started for Greece, and I with him. When fairly upon the sea, our ship was attacked by a pirate, and most of the crew, my father among the rest, were slain. I was brought to Carthage, and sold to one high in power ; and I remained a bondman through many long years, till Torus finally gave me my freedom. At some time I will tell thee of the many plans for liberty and revenge that I have formed, but not now. I have not forgotten the solemn obligation I once took upon myself ; and thou art the first brother who has ever needed assistance at my hands, to my knowledge, when it was in my power to give it. Alkanor has been hard of heart, and has felt no mercy for many a year ; but the memory of the Sacred Hour rekindles an old love in his bosom ; and, in humble imitation of the Widow’s Son, he will offer up even life upon the altar of his duty !”

It would be impossible to describe the various emotions which swept through Alaric's soul while the Egyptian was speaking. He knew he had found a brother—one for whose safety he was bound to sacrifice his own life, if need be—and he had no doubt that the obligation was mutual.

"Alkanor, my brother!" he cried falling upon the Egyptian's bosom, in the first overpowering burst of his gratitude, "surely this event shall not pass for harm to thee. Oh, thou wilt not forsake me now?"

"Not while I have life!" returned the freedman. "Thou art the first who has claimed the love of my heart since the chain was placed upon me, and thou shalt have the whole of it. If they take thee, they must take me, and thou shalt not die while I have life and liberty. Here, take one of these swords, and then come and help me bind the black slaves. When thou seest them both down, come."

Thus speaking Alkanor turned towards the place where the Ethiops stood, and, as he approached them, one of them asked him :

"Art most ready for us?"

"Almost," was the response.

"Our master will be anxious. Let us have back our swords and we will do the work at once, for thou shouldst remember that—"

"I remember enough," interrupted Alkanor, and as he spoke he dealt the foremost black a blow upon the head with his clenched fist that felled him to the earth like one dead. In a moment more he had leaped over the prostrate body, and knocked the second down ; and then he turned to the youth, who quickly came to his assistance.

"The more quickly we move," he said, as the latter came up, "the more time and opportunity we shall have

for escape. We will put these fellows beyond the power of giving an alarm, and then consider."

With thongs and articles of clothing they bound and gagged the two Ethiops, so that they could neither move nor speak, and then Alkanor took them in his arms as though they had been children, and conveyed them to a narrow, deep gorge behind some rocks, and laid them down there, where the master would have much difficulty in finding them.

"Now," he said, as he returned the youth, again extending his hand, "thou knowest my purpose. Henceforth we are as one, bound together by ties of sacred and holy honor which he cannot break and remain men worthy of trust and belief. There are many of our brethren at Syracuse?"

"Over four thousand of them."

"And thou hast some influence there?"

"Yes, else the tyrant would not seek my life as he has done."

"Ah! the king, then, sent those two men to purchase thy life?"

"Yes. In return for thy story I'll tell thee mine, when we have opportunity."

"Right, my brother. And now to the business we have so urgently in hand. We have need of care and circumspection. The master had arranged thus: I was to see thee slain, and then remain by the body while the two slaves went and informed him of the success of the work. Thereupon he was to bring the two visitors hither with him, and show them that the deed was done. Thus it was planned. Now, Torus may wait some time; or his impatience may overcome him. He may come out hither in half an hour. When he comes and finds us not, he will search awhile himself. Then he will return, and storm and curse in his wrath,

and send out others upon the search. Thus it appears probable to me ; so we may count upon an hour, or more, before any strict search will be effected. In the meantime what shall we do ?”

“ Our hope points us towards Sicily ?” said Alaric.

“ Yes.”

“ There can be no use in seeking for concealment here.”

“ On the contrary,” returned Alkanor, “ it would be worse for us. If we escape from Carthage at all, we must do it ere the search for us becomes thoroughly instituted ; for, when it is given out that I am to be apprehended, escape would be next to impossible. I am too well known in this region.”

“ Then why not seek the sea-shore immediately, and put off in the first boat we can find ?” suggested the youth.

“ Such was my own thought,” rejoined Alkanor. “ Do you know the stars which hang upon your island ?”

“ Yes, very well. They are three.” And Alaric pointed to a bright constellation in the northeast.

“ And how great is the distance to the nearest point of Sicily ?”

“ It cannot be over fifty leagues.”

“ Then we had better take to the sea than run any other risk. If the wind does not thwart us, nor any storm arise, we can pull that distance without much trouble. I can procure fruit enough to satisfy our hunger. Come, I will lead the way. I know where there is a boat.”

Upon this the Egyptain started off, and Alaric followed close behind him. The youth felt no weakness now. The presence of so fair a hope, and one which had come so unexpectedly, gave him new strength, and made him almost forget that he had ever

been weak. Alkanor pursued his way down the valley until he came to the vineyard, where he stopped and gathered a lot of grapes and figs, directing his companion to do the same. After this they kept on until they had reached the southern confine of the enclosure and here the Egyptian bade the youth wait a few moments.

"There is a part of the house," he said, "to which I can gain access without fear of discovery, it being the prison, to which I alone have the keys. I shall find something there which we may very much need. I will not be long gone."

Alaric sat down upon the grass, and for awhile he waited very patiently ; but gradually he became uneasy and had begun to consider upon making his way to the sea-shore alone, when Alkanor returned.

"You have worried," said the latter, as he placed a leathern bottle upon the ground, and then set a basket down by his side.

"A little," answered the youth.

"Well, well, we must make the more haste in the time we have left. See, I have water in this bottle ; and in this basket I have bread. We can put our fruit in here, and thus carry it the more easily."

The grapes and figs were put in with the bread, and then Alkanor picked up both bottle and basket and started on again. Alaric offered to carry one of them.

"No," said the freedman. "I am abundantly able, with much strength to spare ; while you may need all the energies you can command when we are clear of this. A little nearer, and I will tell thee why I was gone so long."

The youth approached to his companion's side, when the latter resumed :

"I had to go very near to the master's house to gain admission to the lodge of the prison, and as I came out

I heard voices close at hand, which I discovered to be those of Torus and his two guests, and as I heard your name pronounced I could not but stop a moment to listen. The man called Flavius asked the master if he could put confidence in his slaves; whereupon Torus replied that he had a perfect confidence in them. However, they had become uneasy at the delay, and I left them just starting off for the place where I was directed to have you slain. So they will very soon have their suspicions aroused, and it may not be long before the search will be commenced."

"If we gain the shore, and find a boat, we may be far at sea ere the night is passed," said Alaric, hopefully.

"O! I am sure of the boat," returned Alkanor. "Just beyond this point is one belonging to us. That is, it should be there, though some of the fishermen may be out with it, as they do occasionally pull out after dark. But we shall be sure to find one somewhere."

A small promontory was passed, which brought them to a narrow inlet, and there they saw the boat, pulled partly up on the sand. It was a well-built, stout craft, with four oars, and capable of seating twenty persons. The freedman placed the bottle and basket on board, and then pushed her into the water; and, when Alaric had gained a footing within, he leaped in himself, giving one more push as he did so.

"Now for the oars, and let us be—"

He was cut short in his speech by a loud voice from the shore; and, upon looking up, he saw the outlines of a man, revealed against the open sky, just coming over the promontory.

"Hello!" shouted the new comer. "Who are you with my boat?"

"Only going after fish," returned Alkanor, disguising

his voice as much as possible. "Be back in an hour." Then, turning to Alaric, he added :

"To the oars, quick ! It is only old Gossaff, the fisherman."

And in a few minutes more the boat was darting out from the inlet.

"Hallo-l-o-o !" shouted the fisherman.

But he received no further answer.

"We must pull hard for awhile," said the Egyptian, when they had gained the open sea. "This fellow's unlucky appearance may set pursuers upon our track."

Alaric bent himself to the oar with all his power, nor did he think of fatigue while the peaks of the Carthaginian heights could be seen against the starry sky.

CHAPTER XX.

PURSUIT.

The night was calm and still, and the swelling bosom of the sea was almost unruffled. Until near midnight Alaric remained at his oar, and then Alkanor told him he had better take some rest. At first he refused, and declared that he needed no respite yet.

"Ah," replied the other, "I can see better than that. I can see that thou art much shaken by thy labors ; and well thou mayest be, for thou hast performed far more than many a strong, well man could have endured. And, beside, we know not what the morrow may bring forth. Thy strength may be needed then more than now. So rest awhile, and I will call thee when there is need."

The youth could not hide from himself that his endurance had been tried almost to its extreme capacity, so he finally resigned his oar, and having eaten a few grapes, he lay down in the bottom of the boat, and was soon buried in a profound slumber. When he was awakened it was by feeling a heavy hand upon his shoulder. He started up and gazed about him, and it seemed to be some moments ere he remembered where he was. It was still dark—darker than when he lay down—for a thick haze had settled upon the water and the stars were shut out.

“Are you awake?” the freedman asked.

“Yes, perfectly; and I feel stronger,” replied the youth. “But it has grown darker.”

“Aye, and yet it must be near morning. This mist has only been upon the water a short time, and the sun will soon dispel it, so even if I be steering wrong now, we shall not be long from our true course. But I awoke thee not for this. Bend thine ear to the water and tell me what thou hearest.”

Alaric did as requested, and presently he started up.

“I hear the fall of oars!” he cried.

“Art sure?”

“Yes. I cannot be mistaken.”

“So I have thought. In what direction do they sound?”

“Thus,” replied Alaric, pointing with his hand.

“So they appeared to me. They may be pursuers, my brother.”

“But how long have you heard them?”

“Only a few minutes before I awakened thee. As soon as I felt sure I gave thee a push. They seem to have come from the track we have pursued, and I feel confident that they are after us. Of course old Gossaff told of the stealing of his boat; and as soon as our

absence was discovered, and his story told, the master would know quite well what course to pursue. It was most unfortunate that the old busy-body saw us as he did. However, courage ! If you can bend to your oar we may leave them far behind ere the day breaks."

The youth took his oar, and pulled right bravely ; but, ever and anon, as they stopped to listen, they found that the coming craft was gaining on them.

"It is a heavy boat," said Alkanor, "heavier far than ours ; and I judge that it must be one of the master's barges. If it is we cannot pull away from it."

"Would it not be best to turn from our course ?" suggested Alaric.

"We might try it."

And the suggestion was acted upon, but without avail.

"They can hear our oars as well as we can hear theirs," said Alkanor.

"Then if we lie still, may they not pass us ?" was the youth's next suggestion.

And that was tried, and in a few moments more the fall of the unseen oars also ceased. Yet it was finally concluded to remain as they were until daylight.

"For," said Alkanor, "if they are enemies we shall not escape them by going on, and, as we are now surely turned from the right course, we may only be pulling far out of our way for nothing."

In a little while the daylight came, and when the sun arose, a gentle zephyr moved upon the face of the waters, and the fog began to rise. Our adventurers could now see their pursuer very plainly—for pursuer it was, being no less than the wine-grower's largest barge, manned by fifteen of his slaves, with the master himself at the helm.

"There is no use in pulling," said Alkanor, as his

companion made a movement towards his oar. "They would overhaul us without difficulty. We must face them. What say you?"

"I am ready to face anything," returned Alaric. "By the power of Right, you shall not find my arm weak."

"Good! Those fellows are armed only with short swords. I think I could hold them a warm fight alone; but both of us, if we are careful, can hold them at bay a while at least. They are not swordsmen."

As soon as Torus discovered the fugitives, he ordered his slaves to approach them, and then he turned and make a signal to some one else.

"By the Sacred Bull!" cried Alkanor, "there is another barge with more men in it. Do you see?"

Alaric looked in the direction pointed out, and saw the second barge plainly.

"She has fifteen men also," the freedman added, "and the overseer Hakim has command. If they both reach us—"

He was cut short in his speech by Torus, who had now approached to within a few yards, and who cried out, in a loud, angry voice :

"Fall down, ye villainous traitor, and yield thyself up ere the swords of my slaves let out thy blood!"

"Hold!" returned the Egyptian, with a wave of the hand. "Come not upon us thinking to make an easy conquest, for we shall fight to the death!"

"Dog!" shouted the master, shaking his fist in the air, "put up that sword or I'll have thee flayed alive! By the gods, thou shalt wear thy chains again for this, and heavy ones, too! Run up by the side of their boat," he added to his slaves, "and seize and bind the wretches. Cut them down if they offer resistance!"

"Alaric," spoke the Egyptian, in a hurried tone, and

with a suddenness of manner that had much of confidence in it, "do you put up your sword, and take a more effective weapon. Seize an oar, and keep our boat so that only her bows shall be presented to the barge. If you can do this, I can handle those fellows for a pastime."

However loath the youth may have been to resign his sword, and leave all the real fighting to his companion, he at once saw the advantage to be gained by the manœuver, and he proceeded to follow the instructions as quickly as possible. He had just time to grasp the oar as the barge came alongside, and by a dexterous pull he forced the stern of his own boat off, so that only her bows were open to the attack of the enemy. And this position he managed to maintain, though it cost him extreme labor, and taxed his wit and ingenuity to the utmost.

In the meantime Alkanor was performing what was for him as easy work. Not more than two of the slaves could reach him at the same time, and he cut them down as though they had been sheaves of dry grain. Those who were in advance would have shrunk back from his gigantic arm, but their companions in the rear pushed them forward.

"Cut the dog down!" yelled the master, in frenzied tones. "Down with him! Bring the vessels side by side!"

But both these orders were more easily given than obeyed, because the Egyptian would not be cut down, and the labors of the Sicilian were proof against all their efforts to get the barge alongside the boat.

"Take to the water! Leap, some of you!" shouted Torus, who was too far gone with madness to reason calmly.

But his slaves, who had the work to perform and the brunt to bear, could see more clearly. They had seen six of their number cut down by the Herculean freed-

man, and they knew that, even in a fair field, they could have been no match for him, so they fell back to save their own lives.

“Why don’t you cut the traitorous villain down?” cried the master, stamping with rage. “Will ye give up so? By the fires of Tartarus, I’ll spit thee every one, and roast thee alive for my dogs! Foward! Down with him!”

And again those behind pushed ahead to get out of the way of their maddened master, and those in front leaped into the sea, rather than fall beneath the trenchant blade of the Egyptian giant.

Finally, when only five of the slaves were left in the barge alive, one of them, who seemed to have more wit than his companions, turned to his master and said:

“If we should wait for Hakim we might capture them easily for then we could attack them upon both sides at the same time, and this huge fellow would lose his vantage; but he is a mountain of strength now.”

The master was at first furious that his slave should dare to advise him; but when he came to consider upon the matter, he became more cool, and suffered his barge to drop away from the fugitives’ boat. The other barge was now within a very short distance, and would soon be upon the spot. Torus shouted for his overseer to hurry up, and from his manner, he seemed now to consider his prey perfectly safe.

“We’ll both have fighting to do now,” said our hero, as he watched the coming of Hakim and his crew.

“Yes,” responded the other, resting the dripping point of his sword upon the thwart by his side. “But still we shall be able to gain an advantage. You can plant yourself in one end of our boat, and I in the other, and thus not more than two can reach us at the same time.”

"But you forget," remarked Alaric. "They may lay their boats along upon either side of us, and not board us at all, and thus we shall have an enemy upon both sides of us at the same moment. Such is their plan, I am sure."

"I see, I see," replied Alkanor, with an expression of trouble. "I had not thought of that. But they'll not take us alive."

At this moment they heard Torus utter an exclamation of surprise, and, upon looking towards him, they saw him pointing to the eastward, and calling the attention of his overseer to something in that direction. The fog had now risen completely from the water, and been swept away, and as the fugitives gazed off in the direction indicated by the master's movements, they saw a vessel, carrying many oars, bearing down towards them.

"Is she not of Syracuse?" asked Alkanor.

"She is," replied Alaric; "or at least, so I should judge from her appearance."

"But it is not the same which lay at the shore when we left," said the freedman.

"No," answered the youth. "This is larger. But it may be one upon the same errand."

"By the host of Mars," cried Alkanor, "if such should be the case, I should say that we had found our fate beyond all doubt. But she may only be a trader."

The youth could now see the coming vessel very plainly, for the last film of mist was gone, and she was not over half a mile distant. He knew that she was a Sicilian craft, and, by the direction in which she came, he judged that she must be now from the island.

"Can you guess whether she be friend or foe?" asked the Egyptian.

"I cannot."

Alkanor was about to ask another question, when he

noticed a movement on the part of the barges, which had now come together, and lay only a short distance off.

"We'll seize the dogs at once!" he heard the master say. "Let the ship be what she will, she dare not interfere with us. And then the barges were put in motion, and Torus remained standing by his helmsman, urging his bondmen to hasten with their work.

"Would ye rather trust the barges or the ship?" said Alkanor, hesitating between his sword and his oar.

"If we meet the barges first, we shall have to meet the ship all the same," returned Alaric, who had been thinking over the matter; "for, be she friend or foe, she will surely overhaul us to find out the occasion of our difficulty. So we had better trust to our oars, pull for the ship, and bide the result."

This seemed to be just Alkanor's view of the case, for, without further remark he took the oar, and, in a moment more their boat was in motion. They could not have held a long race with the barges, but for so short a distance as that before them they were safe. It was only a few minutes—not more than five—when they found themselves directly under the vessel's bows, and in a few seconds more Alkanor had seized a rope which hung from her side.

"Who is this?" demanded a voice from the high deck.

Alaric drew in his oar and gazed up, and the first face he saw looking down on him was that of the old fisherman, Glycon. And next he saw Maro, the same who had brought news to Artabanus, at the mountain cave, of the martyrdom of the silversmith. And as he still gazed he saw more faces which he knew. He turned to his companion, and joyfully cried:

"O Alkanor, they are friends! They are brothers!"

By this time those on board the vessel had recognized

the youth, for glad exclamations rent the air, and there was a hurrying of men to and fro, to make preparations for taking him to the deck. Ropes were quickly thrown him over the side, and the fugitives had fairly gained a footing within the ship as the barges came up.

"Who are these that pursue you?" asked Maro, holding the youth by a warm, glad grasp.

"Enemies," answered Alaric. "He who stands there is Torus, and he has held me as a bondman. The others are his slaves. We two have escaped, and they would capture us. This is Alkanor, and he is our brother."

"You wish nothing of him but to be free from him?"

"That's all. Let him and his slaves go without further harm."

Maro then turned to the captain of the ship, and ordered him to put about, and make all haste for home.

"What, ho!" shouted the Carthaginian, "ye will not take those men off. Let me come on board. They are my slaves!"

"Not so," returned Maro, as the ship began to go about. "One of these is a Sicilian, and of a blood that cannot be enslaved."

The barges were obliged to get out of the way of the long, heavy oars of the vessel, and when this feat was accomplished they were left under the stern.

"Pirates! dogs!" yelled Torus, "give me back my slaves!"

But Maro made him no answer. The ship kept on, and the furious vine-grower was left in the distance, to vent his curses and imprecations upon the senseless air, and upon those of his own household who surrounded him. For a while he followed in the Sicilian's wake; but he soon saw the folly of such an attempt, and his barges were finally turned back towards the shores of Carthage.

Alaric's friends now crowded about him, and when they had seen him seated and somewhat recovered from the excitement of the occasion, they asked him concerning his adventures, and he told them his story. He told of leaving the hermit's cave ; of meeting the four soldiers ; of his conflict with them, and its result ; of his passage with the pirate ; of his being sold to Torus ; of the coming of Flavius and Zared ; of the master's plans for his death, and then of the strange recognition of Alkanor, and his noble conduct afterwards. The listeners were filled with wonder at the story ; but they forgot not the generous Egyptian. They embraced him as a friend and a brother, and pledged him their love and fidelity forevermore.

"And now," said our hero, "explain to me how you happened so opportunely to come upon us."

"With pleasure," returned Maro. "I need not now tell you all we have suffered of fear and anxiety on your behalf. We soon learned of your conflict with the soldiers, and also that you had been borne away by a strange vessel. We sent to sea in every direction, but could hear nothing of you, until we learned from one of our brethren at the palace that the king had gained intelligence of you, and that two of his officers were to be sent after you. On the following morning we learned that these officers had instructions to sail for a point of the coast directly east from Carthage, and not many leagues distant, and that they were to find you in a vineyard there. We immediately fitted out this vessel, and made all possible haste, but the king's officers had much the start of us ; though, under the blessing of heaven, we have been favored with success."

Alaric was much fatigued, and so was his companion, and they were conducted to comfortable berths, where they soon fell asleep, and slept soundly until near night-

fall. It was near midnight when the ship anchored off the coast of Sicily, and the craftsmen at once landed and proceeded, by a dubious, covered way, to the cot of Glycon, where they found the hermit, Artabanus. The old man embraced his pupil with tears of joy and gratitude, and when he had been introduced to, and had welcomed the worthy Egyptian, he led the way to the foot of the mountain, and thence to the entrance of the subterranean passage ; and long before morning the whole party were in the chambers of the temple, where Alkanor found his heart expanding with new friendships and where Alaric found plans for the mystic future still under consideration, and himself as important an element as ever.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT.

Alaric very soon recovered from his fatigue under the kind care of his brethren, and attended several meetings in the mystic chamber where he had received his initiation ; and Alkanor, who had proved himself a most worthy brother, was also permitted to attend. And there were meetings held to which the youth was not admitted ; and when he asked why he was thus excluded, he was informed that he had not advanced far enough to give him the privilege of attendance. Yet at these gatherings it was permitted to Alkanor to be present, for he had worked in the higher departments.

“ Rest you easy for the while,” said Artabanus, as he took a seat by the youth’s side. It was in the evening,

and they had just come out from the place of meeting. "You have seen and heard enough to know that what is meant for a secret must be sacredly kept as such. But ere long thou shalt receive light in full."

"Do not mistake me," returned Alaric. "I ask for no secret which does not concern me; but I cannot help seeing that there is some strange destiny hanging over me, and I feel sure that you can read it to me if you will."

"I might read to you many things," answered the old hermit. "Things which would interest you, but which it is not permitted me to do. There is no law which might not, at some time, under some peculiar case, be suspended for the benefit of some individual; and yet it would not do to establish so dangerous a precedent as the setting aside of a fixed and necessary law in any case, or under any circumstances. There is not a law in nature which might at any time be set aside to the benefit of some particular individual; yet the true man will not complain of the laws which God has established, nor seek to violate them. Now, the law under which I am bound to keep certain matters a secret was established for a most laudable purpose; and, could it be broken—were those who were bound by it to be their own judges of when it should be kept, and when disregarded, both you and I might not be safe another hour."

"Pardon me," said the youth. "I think I understand you now. But can you not tell me how much longer this danger is to last? How much longer must I remain secluded in fear of my very life?"

"It shall not be long, my son. Be hopeful on that score."

"And one more thing. Where is Bellerus? Is he dead?"

“ I cannot tell thee, Alaric ; yet I will own that it is generally believed that he has fallen.”

“ And shall not his death be avenged ?”

“ Thou shalt see.”

A few moments the youth remained silent, and then he resumed :

“ Thou hast assured me that Ianthe is safe.”

“ So she is, my son.”

“ Then let me see her.”

“ I cannot bring her hither.”

“ Then let me go to her.”

“ Ah ! there is danger. Thou hast seen already how the enemy lurks upon thy track. Why not restrain thy love for a while ?”

“ I would if it were within reason ; but I feel that I can meet her somewhere. If she cannot come hither, and I cannot go whither she is, why may she not be conveyed to some place near here where I can meet her ? Do not deny me this.”

Artabanus said he would reflect upon it ; and shortly afterwards he took his departure, leaving his pupil with Alkanor, who had just come in.

When the old man left the temple he proceeded to the place where shelter had been found for Ianthe, and was at once admitted to her presence.

“ O ! good Artabanus,” she cried, as soon as she saw the old hermit, “ have you brought Alaric with you ?”

“ No, my sweet child ; it was not safe.”

“ And when will it be safe ? Alas ! I fear me much that it is not all true as you tell me. There is something binding upon me in that ceremony with the king !”

“ Ianthe,” replied the hermit, with a touch of reproof in his tone, “ I tell thee again—there is not the shadow of an obligation made binding upon thee by that wicked

mockery. Thou art the same to Alaric as thou wert before, and he is the same to thee."

"Then let me see him. If my father Bellerus be dead, why shall I be kept from the only living one to whom my whole heart has been given? O! good Artabanus, wilt thou not lead me to him?"

"It ought not so to be; and yet thou almost persuadedst me to be a fool, and go against my own sense. Alaric, too, is equally clamorous to see thee."

Ah, Artabanus, thou shouldst not have told the maiden that. Thou, who hast read so much, shouldst have known the human heart better!

No sooner did Ianthé hear the words than she beset the old man more strongly than before.

"Women are not stopped in the streets, as men were when Alaric was searched for, are they?" she asked.

"No," replied the hermit.

"And has a woman yet been stopped by the guard in any search for me?"

"Not that I know of."

"Or is there any effort being made for my apprehension?"

"I do not know of any. In fact, I think the king dares not make any such, for he would not have anything known concerning thee, even among his own guards."

"Then," cried the maiden, with a show of determination, "carry me to him. We can find plenty of disguises."

At this point Eudora was summoned, and Artabanus asked her if she thought she could so disguise her charge that she could not be recognized.

Now the old woman had been besought so often and so urgently by the maiden upon this very matter, that when she met the imploring glance of the anxious, eager one, she said she could.

“Well,” replied the hermit, somewhat reluctantly, “you may try your hand at it, and, if you succeed, perhaps I will take the incorrigible girl with me. Yet I do it not willingly. I would rather it were not so.”

But Ianthe was not to be persuaded. Her great love blinded her to danger, and while Artabanus did not forbid her, she resolved to run the risk. She had great faith in her old nurse’s ability to disguise her, and she fancied there could be no peril if she was thoroughly concealed from recognition.

* * * * *

Flavius and Zared had returned from Carthage, and they brought with them the report that Alaric was dead, for so Torus had told them. He had assured them that he had seen the youth killed and cast into the sea, and they were forced to take his word for it; so they had paid him the heavy price in gold, and come away. They could not give the king positive assurance of the truth of the vine-grower’s report, but they nevertheless felt much confidence in it. They knew that the barges had met and engaged somebody, for they returned with ten men killed; and the story which Torus told them seemed reasonable.

“It is wondrous strange,” said Pyrrho, after he had heard the story. “How could the youth have turned the heart of that huge slave who had been faithful to his trust for so many years? By the heavens, he must be possessed of some strange power.”

But the king finally resolved that he would consider Alaric dead until he had some positive assurance to the contrary; so he dismissed the officers who had brought him the information, and was then ready to attend to his captain, who had been waiting for a private audience.

“Now, good Claudian, I am ready for thee,” he said.

He was nervous and excited in his manner, and walked continually about to hide and keep down his perturbation as much as possible.

"I have had men of ready wit upon the watch, sire," the captain replied, "but have as yet gained nothing which is directly to the point. That there is some deeply-rooted plot in the city I am satisfied; but I know not where to strike. Yet one thing I have learned which may be of much consequence. My spies have brought me some intelligence of the old hermit who lives in the cave upon the mountain.

"Ha!" cried the king, stopping in his walk. "You mean old Artabanus?"

"Yes."

"Him I have suspected ere this. What have ye learned?"

"That the youth Alaric must have been concealed by him in his cave."

"Is this so? Have ye proof?"

"We have proof enough. He must have come down the mountain when he met the four soldiers, whom he slew. And then we have heard, and do know, that he was once the youth's tutor, and loved him well."

"By Jove! 'tis proof enough. But hear me further, sire: This hermit has been seen in the city of late, and he wears a serious, troubled aspect. He has been seen here late at night. Some of my men, who were disguised as women, have met him, but could not follow him."

"Why not?"

"Because he would disappear into strange places which they could not find."

"By the gods infernal! Are we fallen upon times of sorcery and magic?"

"So it would almost seem, sire. At all events, we are fallen upon times where there is need of action."

“Good Claudian, thou speakest truly,” cried the monarch, stopping again. “And action we’ll have. By the throne of my kingdom, I’ll not rest till I know something of this thing. Do ye think this old hermit is in the city now?”

“If he is I can easily find out, sire; for I have guards posted where the people do not dream of it. Ha! ha! I have some three hundred of my men of smallest stature dressed in female garbs, and they are not mistrusted.”

“But one word, captain, ere I forget it,” said the king, hesitating as though he had been about to speak of something else. “How is it with the temple of Diana?”

“That still bothers me, sire. Agrippa is yet there, and many people flock thither. We dare not interfere at present.”

“But we shall be interfered with! I’ll have him within my power by some means. He has been prating long enough. Put your wits at work, my captain.”

“So I have had them at work, sire, for many days—aye, for weeks—but to no effect. He will not come to the palace willingly, and I cannot force him from his sacred place. The people will not see the holy places profaned.”

“Well, well; we’ll think and talk of him anon. Go now in search of this old hermit, and, if ye find him, bring him hither. If there be treason in his old body I’ll have it out of him. Hasten, for it is getting late.”

“I may not find him at this time of night, sire; but I’ll make inquiries, and if we find him not within the city, we’ll send on the morrow to the mountain.”

Thus speaking the captain withdrew, and the king then sent for his chamberlain, to whom he related what had transpired.

"I know the old man well, your majesty," said Donatus. "I have never suspected him of evil, because I never had my suspicions turned in that direction ; but I do know that he would make a most dangerous enemy, for he is not only deeply versed in all manner of learning, but he is much loved and honored by the people I know he was a warm friend to Helixus—"

"Ha ! was he ?"

"Yes ; and I think his tutor, too. I am sure Helixus learned of him."

"Then, by the swords of Mars, he may be possessed of knowledge which he should not have. But I'll have him ere long and when I have him I'll make such use of him as I deem best."

The king walked up and down the room awhile, and presently his thoughts fell into another channel.

"Donatus," when he stopped again, "how long is it since the lady Ianthe escaped from me ?"

"It has been seven weeks, sire, as I have counted."

"Aye, so it has. And yet my slaves have been able to gain no trace of her. I wish I dared trust the guard with that secret. We might gain her thus."

"But that would not answer, sire."

"I know—I know," quickly rejoined Pyrrho. "With all my anxiety I would not trust that secret in unsafe hands. But, Donatus, I have a strong hope that we shall soon be able to probe this strange mystery ; and when we once gain a starting point, we will push matters to the very extreme."

After this the king fell into another fit of musing and for more than half an hour he walked up and down without speaking. Finally, however, he stopped, and looked into his chamberlain's face. There was an eager, anxious expression upon his countenance, and his lips were firmly compressed.

“Donatus,” he said, “for eight years I have held this throne, and I have sat firmly upon it. Do you think I could be hurled from it now?”

“I should hope not, sire.”

“Aye, and I will not be!” the monarch cried with a stamp of the foot. “I have swords enough at my command to hold me here. Say, Donatus, my soldiers could not prove treacherous?”

The chamberlain may have thought how many deeds of injustice and cruelty Pyrrho had done to his soldiers, in fits of rage and anger; but he was spared the necessity of replying by the entrance of a page, who announced that the captain of the guard was at hand, and sought admittance.

“Ah, good Claudian,” cried the king, as his captain entered, “I see success stamped upon thy very face. Hast brought Artabanus?”

“I have, sire.”

“And had ye any difficulty in taking him?”

“No, sire; I prepared for that beforehand. When I reached the square of Diana’s Fountain, I was informed by my private guard that the hermit had passed there twice, and would be likely to pass again. They pointed out the route he had taken, and I laid my plan to have him arrested without noise or confusion. To this end I selected a dark nook, by which he would return, if he came as before, and there posted ten of my men, being careful that they were entirely concealed. And I was fortunate in my selection, for not many minutes afterwards the old man came along, and with him was a boy. We rushed upon them both with such suddenness and concert, that they were bound and gagged ere they could cry out for help; and forthwith with me brought them hither.”

“Bring them before me—bring them before me—

both—both—both of them,” commanded the king. And when he had thus spoken, he went and seated himself upon his chair of state.

In a few moments Artabanus was led into the royal presence, and with him came a boy, habited in the garb of a mason’s apprentice. The prisoners were still bound, but the bandages had been removen from their mouths. Artabanus stood firm and unshaken, though there were shades upon his face which betrayed much trouble. The youth, however, trembled violently, and seemed overwhelmed with fear and apprehension.

“Thou art Artabanus, the hermit?” said the king, gazing into the old man’s face with a scowl of malignant cast.

“I am,” was the prisoner’s reply.

“And who is this companion of thine?”

“A poor child whom I was conducting home.”

“How now, boy,” cried the king, “why dost thou tremble so? What hast thou done that thou shouldst fear me? Hold up thy head, and let me see thy face. Perdition! does he not hear? Claudian, lift the boy’s head!”

As this command was given, the youth started quickly nearer to the hermit, and cast a glance towards the captain. Donatus, who had been watching the light, graceful, quaking form most narrowly, caught a view of the features as the head was raised, and with a sudden exclamation of wonder and astonishment he pushed the captain back, and then darted towards the throne.

“Sire,” he whispered, in a gasping tone, “it is the lady Ianthé!”

“No!”

“It is, as I tell thee! Order out the guard at once!”

As soon as the first overwhelming effect of this announcement could be overcome, the monarch leaped

to his feet. The motion caused the prisoners both to glance upon him, and he saw the maiden's features plainly.

"Claudian," he commanded, in quick, husky tones. "Thou mayest leave us, and take thy men with thee. Thou hast done nobly—nobly, I say! And thou shalt be rewarded, too, my most fortunate captain!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TYRANT IN POWER.

As soon as the king was left alone with his chamberlain and the prisoners, he darted towards the maiden and caught her by the arm. She uttered a low cry of terror as she felt the hand of Pyrrho upon her, and would have shrunk away had he not drawn her towards him. For a moment there was a flaming light in the old hermit's eye, and once he raised his foot as though he would plant it upon the tyrant's body; but by a mighty effort—an effort which required all his powers of mind and body—he restrained himself, and sacrificed his present emotions to the duties which had their result in the future.

"Aha!" the monarch cried, as he tore off the boy's cap, and saw the glossy tresses fall in a shower upon her shoulders, "I have found thee, have I? And thou art thus returned to thy husband."

"Husband?" repeated Artabanus, in a tone of intense feeling, as though he would have hurled the lie back into the teeth of the tyrant.

"Aye, old man—she is my wife! Dost see anything

wondrous in that ? But I'll send her to a place of safety now, and question thee apart." Thus speaking, the king clapped his hands thrice, and a page entered, who was commanded to go and bring the chief of the eunuchs.

"Now, pretty one, we'll lay our plans more surely than before," Pyrrho resumed, turning again to the maiden. "Thou shalt not suffer from such unwarrantable intrusions as before ; and I have a place prepared where the casements be not left open to let the chill night air in upon thee ! Oho ! thou shalt be most excellently cared for !"

Presently the eunuch made his appearance.

"Mestor, dost know this person ?" the king cried, pointing to the disguised maiden.

"All good spirits bless me ! it is the lady——"

"My wife, thou meanst, slave !"

"Aye, sire, it is thy wife."

"And now mark me !" resumed Pyrrho, moving his finger up and down with significant expression, and speaking slowly and sternly : "I place her again in your charge, and with your life shall you answer for her ! If you know not how to guard her, then who should ?"

"She shall be guarded, sire, so that not even a mouse can gain access to her apartment without my knowledge."

"It is well. Thou knowest whither to convey her. Take her hence, and be thou responsible."

Up to this time Ianthé had not spoken, but when the huge black approached her she leaped towards the hermit, and laid her head upon his bosom. She struggled mightily to rend the bonds that confined her arms, but she could not do it.

"Help ! O, mercy !" she shrieked. "Father ! father ! Artabanus ! is there no hope ?"

For a moment there was a convulsion of the old man's frame, even as though the heaving, swelling bosom would burst. His arms strove against the cruel bonds, and his teeth were ground together like the stones of a mill, in his great agony. But finally he conquered, and as the paroxysm passed away he said in a whisper :

"Suffer them now, in their hour of triumph, to do as they will. Jehovah is good, and His mercy endureth forever !"

"Oh ! had I obeyed thy counsel."

"Obey me now, and trust a power mightier than the king's."

"That power is not on earth !" exclaimed Pyrrho, who had overheard the remark.

"But it is in heaven !" replied the old man.

"By the gods, 'tis not there for dogs and traitors. Bear her hence, Mestor. I'll see thee ere the morning comes."

The eunuch grasped the maiden by the arm, and quickly bore her from the room, and when she was gone, the king retired to his throne and sat down, as though he would recover from some fatigue ere he went further. He rested his head upon his hand as though it ached, but mayhap he only sought to concentrate his thoughts. Finally he started up and waved his hand towards two men who stood behind the throne—who always stood there when he was present. They were stout, well-built men, with skins as black as night, and had been deaf and dumb from childhood. They were slaves who could protect and obey their master, without the power to perceive or reveal his secrets. They understood the meaning of the king's motion to them, for they walked at once to the bound prisoner and led him forward to the throne, where they remained standing by his side.

Donatus approached the royal seat, and stood at his sovereign's right hand.

"Now, old man," spoke the king, bending a searching glance upon the prisoner, "I have questions of importance to ask thee, and I give thee the most solemn assurance that thy life shall answer for thy truth and promptness. Wilt thou answer me?"

"I will answer," the old hermit responded, and he spoke as calmly as though he had not been troubled in mind during the night.

"Then first: Dost know the story of the life of the maiden who came hither with thee?"

"I do."

"And didst thou know that I had made her my queen?"

"I knew that thou hadst performed a ceremony with that seeming effect."

"And dost thou know how she escaped me?"

"Yes. I have heard that the wonderful priest of Abydos led her hence."

"By the tongue of Apollo, thou answerest most promptly so far. Let us see if thy frankness will hold out. Did the priest give her into thy charge?"

"No. I found her at the house of a friend."

"But thou wouldst have shielded her from me."

"I would."

"Dost thou know this priest of Abydos?"

"I have seen him."

"But thou knowest more. Who is he?"

"He is Agrippa, and if thou hast doubts or suspicions concerning him, I cannot remove them."

"You mean you will not."

"I cannot."

"Has he not been in Syracuse before this, to your knowledge?"

"I think he has, but I will not positively say."

"Well, let him go. I may soon have opportunity to question him personally. And now tell me what thou knowest of a treasonable plot in this city."

"Sire," replied the old man, betraying not the least sign of fear or emotion at the question, "thou shouldst remember that I live not in the city. I know of nothing beyond my own sphere of action."

"Aye, and thy sphere of action has seemed to run very close upon our own," said the king, with some show of wit, "so we would question thee. Is there not a plot of some kind in the city brewing against me?"

"Against thee, sire? Thou doest trifle with sense to ask such questions of me. The lady Ianthe was my pupil, and, in memory of old friendship, I would have helped her. All this I own; but if thou hast suspicions running into plots and treasons, thou hast fallen upon the wrong man to question."

"And thou hast given shelter to Alaric?" cried Pyrrho, gazing into the old man's face as though he thought he would deny the charge.

"I have," frankly replied the hermit. "He came to my cave, and I gave him both food and shelter, and had he acted wisely, he would not have left so secure a retreat."

After this the king put many questions to Artabanus, some relating to Alaric, and some to Ianthe, and others to the suspected plot; but the old man evaded them all in so shrewd and cunning a manner that the inquisitor was completely baffled and bewildered, being fairly lost in a maze of his own making. Finally he motioned for the two mutes to lead the prisoner to the other end of the room, and then called his chamberlain to his side.

"Donatus," he said, in a low tone, "what thinkest thou?"

“He is a dangerous man, sire.”

“But can we get any more from him?”

“I think not. He may know more than he has revealed, but I do not think it could be forced from him. I think the sooner he is disposed of the better.”

“Ha!” muttered the king, with a savage scowl. “If he knew the fate that awaits him, he would not be so bold and free with his tongue. As sure as the Fates rule, Donatus, he has some knowledge of this strange plot.”

“I think he has, sire, but I am confident we shall get nothing more from him. If he is concerned, it must be as a leader, and we shall gain enough in putting him out of the way. We’ll have some of the lesser lights ere long, and from them we may torture all we seek.”

“Perhaps thou art right, Donatus. Let us go to the room of the mystic vault at once. Thou shalt accompany me, and see the old man and his important secrets disappear together!”

Thus speaking, Pyrrho arose from his throne, and beckoned again to his mute slaves, and they followed him, leading the prisoner along with them. When they reached the door of the fatal chamber, the king threw it open and entered, and at once passed to the opposite side, where the secret spring was, which, when he had found it, he covered with his feet. The slaves had advanced upon the marble slab, when he motioned to them with his hands, and they left the prisoner and retired, closing the door behind them.

“Hold!” cried the monarch, as Artabanus moved his position very slightly. “I would speak with thee one word more ere I conduct thee further. And, mark me, it is no light thing. How many in Syracuse know the lady Ianthé’s history?”

A light sparkled in the old man's eyes as he answered :

"I think but very few. I know of none save us who are here, and the priest of Abydos."

A moment the king gazed upon his prisoner, and while a demoniac expression rested upon his features, and his teeth and lips were firmly set, he pressed his foot upon the fatal spring. In an instant the broad slab flew open, and the old hermit who had stood very near the center of the decending portion, disappeared into the horrid abyss ! Pyrrho and his chamberlain both looked down, but they could see nothing save thick darkness ; an awful hush fell upon their ears from the infernal gloom ! The vault was closed up as before, and as the dull, heavy clang of the stone died away, the monarch turned to companion and spoke :

"Thus is the tongue hushed in silence, and one more busy brain laid low ! And here shall the dangerous and suspected ones be cast as fast as they can be found. It is a handy place, Donatus, and saves much trouble. There can be no escaping from executioners here. And now we will attend to other matters. This has not moved thee, has it ?"

"Not a jot, sire."

"I thought thou didst look a little pale about the lips."

"Tut, thou shouldst not think me so weak of heart, your majesty. I am not a girl. The light of your torch plays you false."

"Never mind. 'Tis a terrible fate, though."

"More terrible in appearance than in fact," added the chamberlain ; "for the death must be very sudden ; or, at best, unconscious."

"Right, right, Donatus. And hence I claim much credit for my mercy."

With this bit of cruel wit, and with a triumphant smile upon his face, the king left the chamber of the vault, and locked the door behind him.

In the meantime Ianthe had been conducted to an apartment where, she was informed by the eunuch she was to remain for the time being. It was a large room and well furnished. The door, she saw, was a heavy one, and she could tell by the sound of the bolts that they were massive. She found the windows to be guarded by bars of brass, and the stools high from the floor. When she had been left alone she sank down upon one of the couches, and gazed upon the great brazen lamp which the eunuch had lighted. She did not weep, nor did she seem to be wholly moved by fear. There was much of remorse in her soul, and she blamed herself for what had happened. And so the varied emotions followed each other in her bosom, now of Alaric, now of fear for Artabanus, who might have to suffer for the part he had acted ; now for other friends who might be implicated, and finally she broke forth into self-condemnation again, and most eagerly did she wish that she had listened to the counsel of one who was able to advise her.

She had just arrived at that point where she was ready to fall into the dark depths of her own grief, when her door was opened, and the king entered. He had removed the crown from his head, and the royal robe of purple and gold had been laid aside for a lighter mantle of white linen. He approached to within a few feet of where the maiden sat, and gazed fixedly into her face. He did not seem very angry, nor very stern ; but he did show much of triumph upon his dark features, and in the burning of his evil eye.

“My queen !” he finally said, “it was not meet that

we should be so long separated. Art thou very sorry to be with me once again ?”

Ianthe returned the monarch's look, and as she read the sensual expression which was stealing over his face, she shrank away as though from an asp.

“I am thy prisoner,” she said, pressing her hands tightly upon her bosom ; “and thou knowest whether a prisoner can be glad.”

“But I say thou art no prisoner. Thou art my wife !”

“Oh ! were that fate possible, it would be worse than death !”

“Fool !” cried Pyrrho, in a rage, “wouldst thou make thy fate worse than need be ? Here ! see !” And as he spoke he moved to one side of the room, and threw open a large door, which the maiden had not before discovered. Beyond was a sumptuously furnished chamber, within which was a bed, with the royal trappings of purple and gold.

“This is our nuptial chamber,” the monarch continued ; “and this very night thou shalt occupy the place of the queen ! I leave thee now for just one hour, and then I shall return. If I find thee not in thy place, I'll have thee put there by slaves ! Dost understand me now ?”

“No ! no !” gasped the maiden, now terrified beyond reason. “It would be too monstrous !”

“For me to claim the right of a king in his own chamber, eh ? to ask obedience at the hands of his queen, is it ? By the loves of Venus, we shall see ! I go, as I have said ; and if at the end of the hour I find thee not upon yonder nuptial couch, my slaves shall put thee there ! I swear it by all my hopes of earth and of heaven ! This time there is no room for mis-hap !”

With this the monarch strode from the apartment, and as Ianthe heard the heavy door clang behind him,

and the strong bolts thrown into their sockets, she sank fainting upon the floor. Presently the door opened again, and the chief of the eunuchs came in. He picked the maiden up, and bore her to the couch; and there he seemed to care for her with more than a slave's attention. He was eager and anxious, and a look of pleasure, such as he had not shown before for years, lighted upon his black features, as he saw the beautiful being open her eyes with returning life.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LIGHT ! LIGHT !

It was some time past midnight when a strange priest entered the Temple of Diana. His garb was like unto that worn by Agrippa, and he was old and toil-worn; but he moved with haste, for he seemed to have a matter of much moment upon his hands. He sought the mystic chamber, and soon found him of Abydos, with whom was the high priest, Pythion. Their conference was short, but earnest and excited; and, when they had closed, all the messengers in the temple were summoned, and sent off to different parts of the city. Then Agrippa took from a closet a bag, made of the finest tissue of silk-like gossamer in substance, but made compact by the application of fine gluten. The mouth of this bag, or sack, which was large in size, was extended by a hoop of light, metallic wire, from which depended a small chain of light material. A fire was built in a deep chafing dish, upon which the old man placed combustible materials of strange compounding

and then the mouth of the sack was held over the fitful blaze. Gradually the body of the silken bag began to expand, as the light smoke arose into it, until finally it was swelled to its utmost capacity, and remained suspended in mid-air, seeming eager to break from the lashing that held it down. Agrippa now produced a ball which he had prepared, and secured it to the end of the long chain that hung from the hoop ; and then he conveyed the whole to the rear court of the temple. A torch was applied to the suspended ball, and in an instant it burst into a flame of intense brightness, and shot forth sparks of gleaming fire. When the strange contrivance was liberated, it shot up into the air to an immense height, and then sailed away over the city, the ball of living flame glaring like some fiery demon, and the bright sparks still leaping forth like stars. The whole city was lighted up for the time, and long before the wondrous thing was gone the people had started from their beds, and rushed into the street, some called up by the sudden glare, while others were aroused by the shouts of their neighbors.

Away sailed the mysterious orb of fire through the midnight sky, the people watching it with intense wonder, and many with fear and terror, until it finally disappeared from sight. The watchers gazed for a long time but it did not appear again, and they finally dispersed. But all went not to their homes. No. There were many who went other ways. In the deep gloom which succeeded the awful light there were many persons moving in directions opposite from their dwellings, moving like spectres through the darkness—some in bodies, and some alone—moving eagerly and persistently on—each and all apparently having some object of more than ordinary import in view. Once a soldier stopped two of these people, who were moving on

together, and asked them whither they went. They asked him if he had not received the light. He told them yes.

“And whence did it come?” they further asked.

“Why,” he replied, thinking they alluded to the strange ball of fire which had just passed over the city. “I did not see it start, but I saw it in the sky.”

“That is not our light,” said the citizen. “The light of which we spoke came from the East.” The soldier would have detained them further, but they struck him to the earth with weapons which they had worn concealed about them, and then hurried on.

Alaric was alone in one of the apartments beneath the temple, where he was waiting for the coming of Artabanus, who had promised to bring him some intelligence of Ianthe. And why did not the old man come? It had been several hours since he went away, and he had promised to return very quickly. The youth saw not the strange light which had startled the inhabitants of Syracuse; but he had heard the sound of confusion in the temple, and he wondered what it meant. He was about to leave the apartment to seek an explanation, when Agrippa appeared before him. He had seen the venerable priest several times, and had been led into much wonder by his speech and appearance.

“Good father,” he said, with eagerness, as the priest turned towards him after the door was closed, “has Artabanus returned?”

“He has not,” replied the old man.

“Have you heard from him?”

“Yes.”

“And where is he? Why does he not come? Has anything befallen him or Ianthe?”

“Thou shalt hear from them anon, my son.”

“And this confusion in the temple, what is this, father?”

“Of that, too, thou shalt hear in proper time.”

“But thou art excited and anxious,” cried the youth, now for the first time noticing how the old priest compressed his lips beneath the white beard, and how his brow was contracted. “Something has happened of startling moment. What is it?”

“Wait a time with patience, my son, and thou shalt be informed.” And as the priest thus spoke, he took a seat close by the youth’s side.

“Now, Alaric,” he resumed, with a change in his tone and manner, “I must open to thee the secret which thou hast been so anxious to obtain. The time has arrived, and the word must be spoken !”

The youth moved nearer to the old man’s side, and gazed eagerly into his face.

“I will tell you the story, and I will tell it so that you shall understand it,” continued Agrippa ; “and when I have spoken, thou shalt find need of strength and purpose. Do you remember who ruled in Sicily eighteen years ago?”

“Aye,” replied Alaric, with a kindling eye. “It was the good Helixus. Young as I then was, I remember him, for he used to be kind to me, like one who loved children. My father used to take me with him to the palace, and I remember well how the royal Helixus took me upon his knee, and let me play with his bright crown.”

“Helixus was a good king, and a good man,” pursued the priest ; “and he was well-beloved by his people ; and it is of him that I would speak. One day, Helixus was taken sick, and for several months he lay upon his bed in pain and weakness. His young wife watched

with him and nursed him, and she, too, fell sick, and shortly died.

“Now, there was a cousin of the king’s named Glaucus, who was a powerful general in the army, and who had much influence with the soldiers ; and this Glaucus had set his heart upon the crown of Sicily. The king heard of it, and he was exceedingly troubled, for he knew that the general was a wicked, unscrupulous man, and that he might succeed in a rebellion, should he undertake one. But the good monarch was not troubled for himself the most. He had a child—an infant—it was his only child, and he loved it most tenderly. This child would stand in the way of the usurper, and she might be cruelly murdered. It was a bright-eyed, innocent girl, and as Helixus held it to its bosom, all his anxiety centered upon it. In his trouble he sent for Artabanus, who had been his tutor and his counsellor, and spoke to him. ‘I care not for myself,’ he said, ‘for I have but a few short days to live at best ; but for my innocent child I have much fear. She is my only heir, and she will surely be slain by the usurper who would gain the throne. What shall I do with her?’

“It was finally arranged that the infant should be secretly conveyed from the palace, and Artabanus promised that he would find a safe refuge for it. It was so done, and when people asked the king where the child was, he answered that he did not know. He said she had been taken from him, and he knew not whither she had been carried ; and in all this he spoke truly, for he did not know what disposition Artabanus had made of the infant. After this good Helixus failed rapidly, and finally Glaucus raised the standard of rebellion. The feeble king heard of it, and he desired to escape from the assassin’s knife, and die in peace. So Artabanus contrived to have him secretly conveyed to the

temple, and from thence he was carried out by the subterranean passage, and borne to the hermit's cave on Mount Catalano.

“On the very next day Glaucus marched into the city, and took the throne. He caused search to be made for Helixus, but the dying monarch could not be found, and the usurper finally gave up the idea of finding him, thinking he must have died, and been secretly buried. Only a few days passed of life to Helixus after he was removed to the mountain, but during the brief time he had his senses perfectly, and made arrangements with Artabanus for the care of his child. He still looked upon the throne as his, and he felt that he had the right to name his successor. So he declared that he gave his sceptre to his beloved child ; and he left it with the hermit to judge, in the time to come, whether 'twere well for the heir that she should ever be presented to the people as such, and have the cares and anxieties incident thereto thrown upon her shoulders.

“At length the poor king died, and Artabanus had the body conveyed to the temple, and exposed on the ground floor. The people flocked in large numbers to pay their last tribute of respect to the remains of him who had been so kind to them, and who they had loved so well ; and I do not exaggerate when I say that the marble pavement was wet, as though by rain, with the tears which the honest people shed. Glaucus was highly incensed, and tried to find out who had caused this exhibition of the dead monarch ; but he could gain no information ; and, as he was thus assured that Helixus was really dead and buried, he let the matter drop.

“From that time to the present, the history of our government has been dark with crime and oppression, as you well know. Glaucus reigned five years, and was then murdered by Basilus, who seized upon the sceptre,

and kept it just five years more. Then Pyrrho looked up from his place in the army, and resolved that he would be king ; and, through blood and carnage, he worked his way to the throne. Your noble father fell beneath the tyrant's merciless ambition, and so fell all who dared to cry out against him. His reign, for these past eight years, has been marked only by deeds of the grossest tyranny and oppression ; and the people have suffered beyond endurance.

"But of this child, this infant, whom Helixus left?" said Alaric, as the old man hesitated.

"I was coming back to her, my son. I told thee she was left with Artabanus ; but he could not keep her. His bleak home upon the mountain was not the place for her ; and then he had just been elected Grand Master of the Craftsmen of our Mystic Tie, which office made great drafts upon his time, as he had to spend a portion of every day in teaching the principles of art and architecture, and also in drawing designs for new structures upon the tressel-board in the temple, so that the master workmen might study them at their leisure. Among the craftsmen in the city was a man named Bellerus, who had no children of his own, and to him Artabanus resolved to intrust the child. He told to Bellerus the whole story, and the humble workman consented to assume the responsibility. And under his roof the child grew to be a beautiful maiden, and the hermit wondered if he would ever suffer her to be burdened with the cares of a crown. If such should finally be deemed proper, would it not be necessary that she should have some one to help and assist her ? And would it not be well that her counselor should be bound to her by stronger ties than those of office ? And then, again, would not the maiden's heart be naturally yearning after some kindred spirit, and must not love, sooner or

later, make its way to her bosom? These thoughts were dwelt upon by Artabanus and by Bellerus, and they concluded to select a companion for her. You, Alaric, had been the hermit's pupil, and he knew you well. He not only knew that your moral qualities were all that could be desired, but he also knew that your name would be a mountain of strength should the hour ever come when it would be necessary to depose a tyrant for the good of the people, because your father had been the counsellor of the good Helixus, and was universally beloved by all honest men. So it seemed peculiarly fit that thou shouldst be the chosen mate. Thy father was let into the secret, and he joined in our plans with all his heart. You were suffered to go to the house of Bellerus, and young as you were, the love of your hearts was not long in manifesting itself.

“Then came the advent of Pyrrho—the death of your father—and the flight of yourself. Time passed on, and as the maiden became a woman, in both years and understanding, Artabanus, who knew not whether you lived, asked her if she could ever choose another husband. Her answer was only a flood of tears, with the oft-repeated assurance that, whether she ever saw you again or not, she should never love another. So the subject was dropped, and preparations were made to search for you, and see if any tidings could be gained. By some mishap—some careless word—it leaked out among the people, that hopes were entertained that Alaric, the son of Orneus, was yet alive, and that he would be searched for. This reached the ears of the officers of the king, and they pried into it with all their wit and ingenuity. Something, too, was discovered concerning the beautiful maiden at the old mason's, but how much I know not. I only know that when Pyrrho first saw her he knew her at once. There had always been

a suspicion lurking in the minds of those in power that the child of Helixus did not die, but that she had been secreted by some one who still lived. It leaked out that a beautiful maiden was beneath Bellerus' roof, and that the son of Orneus had loved her. Where danger is great, and retribution merited, suspicion is strong and rampant, and when suspicion once turned upon the maiden—"

"Call her Ianthe!" cried the youth, who had become strangely excited.

"Aye, of Ianthe I speak," resumed the old man, in hurried tones, for the noise in the temple was increasing, and heavy feet were heard passing to and fro. "I will finish very quickly. When suspicion once turned upon the maiden, and upon yourself—dim and shapeless as it was—it was enough. You came, and you were recognized. Through you the maiden was found, and Bellerus seized and entrapped. Enough was thus discovered, and enough suspected, to cause the tyrant to believe that upon Ianthe's destiny rested his own—that she was a legal heir to the throne, and that the people would support her, if they found her, out of the old love they bore her father. So he resolved to make her his own queen, and thus gain the power of her claim to himself. You have been told how he tried this, and how I rescued her from him."

"Yes, yes; and who art thou, strange man, that thus move me ever and anon with the assurance that I have known thee before?"

"Never mind that now. Where, think ye, is Ianthe?"

"Safe, is she not?"

"Aye, safely now is she, within the power of the king!"

"Great heavens! speakest thou seriously?" gasped the youth, starting to his feet.

“Aye. She and Artabanus have been both this night seized and conveyed to the palace !”

“Ah ! and this confusion—is it for their deliverance ?”

“Alaric, all the craftsmen of our city, to the number of four thousand, and many of the soldiers who hate the tyrant, are armed and ready for a leader. Wilt thou lead them ?”

“To the rescue of Ianthe ?”

“Aye, and the rescue of a throne !”

“Yes, yes,” cried the youth, clasping his hands, and raising them towards heaven. “The light breaks upon me now ! Not for my honor—not for my sake—but, Great Jehovah, in thy Name, and for my suffering countrymen, I thus draw my sword, and follow this wondrous destiny !”

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOPE OF TRIUMPH IN DESPAIR.

When Ianthe returned to consciousness, and found the huge black standing over her, the memory of her situation came to her mind, and with a cry of terror she started up, and would have leaped from the couch had he not held her where she was.

“Oh !” she cried, raising her clasped hands frantically towards him, “can you not feel some spark of sympathy for me ? Does your black skin shut off all human feeling ?”

“What would you have me do ?” asked the eunuch, speaking sternly, but yet showing some compassion in his look.

"Give me a dagger!"

"And what would you do with a dagger?"

"Protect my soul from the taint of that man's foul purpose."

"But thou wouldst be a mere child in his grasp, even with thy dagger."

"You do not understand me. I am in his power, I have no help, those whom I love are cut off, and ere I would suffer his polluted touch I would take my own life! Oh, if thou canst feel one jot of compassion, if there burns in your bosom one spark of sympathy, I implore thee, give me some weapon, I care not what it is, so it may reach my heart when the moment of necessity comes."

"You need not ask me that," returned the black, "for I cannot grant it."

"Will you not?"

"No."

Again the maiden threw herself upon the couch and groaned aloud in her agony. After awhile she started up and asked Mestor how long she had had lain insensible, and he told her that she must have been so nearly an hour. Even as he answered her the door was rudely opened, and the king strode into the apartment.

"How!" he cried, approaching the couch; "not yet abed? Why art thou here, Mestor?"

"She fainted, sire, after you went out; and I have just succeeded in reviving her."

"And has she spoken?"

"Aye, sire, most importunately. She asked me to give her a weapon—a dagger."

"Ha, would she kill me?"

"Not so. She would kill herself. She found me immovable, and had just settled down as you entered."

"So, so. Very well, we shall see. Thou mayest

retire, Mestor." Then the king turned toward the maiden, and bade her to rise. She obeyed him instinctively.

"Dost see that nuptial chamber?" he demanded, pointing towards the open door.

She made no reply.

He was upon the point of speaking again, when a bright light streamed in through the barred window, as though some building were in flames. He leaped to the stool, and saw a huge ball of fire in the heavens moving over the city. It shot forth sparks of intense brilliancy, and the whole capital was lighted up as though by the sun. The king watched it from where he stood, until it finally disappeared over the sea; and when it was wholly gone, and darkness, seemingly more intense than before, had settled back upon the city, he stepped down upon the floor, trembling with superstitious fear. The sound of many voices arose upon the air in a confused din, and through the palace were heard the tread of feet in wild disorder. The monarch shook off the first paralyzing load of terror that had fallen upon him, and then started back, and called aloud for his chief eunuch.

"What ho, there! Ha! hast thou not been from the apartment?"

"I waited to observe that marvelous ball of fire, your majesty. I could not go."

"Then you saw it?"

"Yes, sire."

"And what think ye of it?"

"I know not what to think. It is most wonderful."

"So it is, Mestor. And do you hear this strange din in the city, which comes up like the muttering of a young earthquake?"

"Yes, plainly, sire."

"By the gods! I must see what this all means. Look to the maiden, Mestor, and allow no living soul to approach her till I return. Wilt be careful?"

"I'll guard her with my very life, sire."

"Good. I shall not be long away."

With this the king hurried out from the apartment, and made all haste to the throne-chamber, where he hoped to find some of his chief officers in this emergency. And he was not disappointed. He found his chamberlain and his jailer there, and several of the lieutenants and privates of the palace guard. He might have felt more at ease in thus finding himself among his attendants had he not seen that they, too, were terrified and fearful.

"Donatus," he cried, "did ye see that wonderful fire that passed over the city?"

"Aye, sire, we all saw it," replied the chamberlain, trembling.

"And what make ye of it?"

"I know not what to make, sire. It must be some sign. I never saw the like before."

"How wanes the night, Donatus?"

"It is an hour past midnight, or more."

At this juncture the door at the lower end of the apartment was thrown open, and the captain of the guard entered. He was pale and excited, and trembled at every joint.

"Ha, Claudian, what bringest thou?"

"Wondrous news, sire, and startling, too," replied the captain.

"Didst see that awful fire in the heavens?"

"Ah, sire, it is of that I would speak. I have just come from the great gate of Apollo, and the people are hurrying to and fro with incredible swiftness."

"Are they so fearful?"

"No, sire. They seem far from fearful. They move with much method, and I think some of them are armed."

"Ha!" exclaimed Pyrrho, starting madly across the room, "this smells of rebellion. But, by the gods, I'll quench it in the kindling! I'll strangle it at its birth! Claudian, hence at once, and dispatch couriers to every post within the city! Arouse every soldier, and have every post guarded; and then arrest every citizen who may be found abroad, no matter what his business or condition. Make all possible haste, and send me word how matters stand. Let no soldier sleep in Syracuse to-night."

The captain withdrew, and the king then sent out one of his lieutenants to see why there was so much noise in the court of the palace. After this he paced the floor awhile, and then seated himself upon the throne.

"Donatus, come hither," he said, and the chamberlain advanced to his side.

"Dost think this is rebellion in earnest?"

The officer saw how pale and agitated his royal master was, and he would have hidden the truth, but he knew 'twould be of no use.

"Sire," he replied, "I fear much that it is."

"But how—how can it have been brought to such a pitch within a city guarded as this has been?"

"Ah, sire, thou knowest we have had suspicions of this."

"Aye, so we have; but they rested on grounds which we have taken up. The daughter of Helixus is in my power; Alaric dead; and both Bellerus and Artabanus, who had charge of the maiden, rest at the bottom of my Tartarian vault. With the heads thus lopped off, how can the body of sedition stalk abroad to any purpose?"

"It may not, sire. Our well-disciplined soldiery must soon put it down."

"They will ! they will ! Ah ! here comes a messenger. How now, Sirrah ?"

A lieutenant of the guard, who had at that moment entered, approached the throne.

"Sire," he said, trembling as he spoke, "I come from Claudian."

"I care not whence thou comest. Out with thine errand, and stand not there quaking as though thy head were under the axe !"

"The people are armed in all quarters, sire, and their purpose seems fixed. When stopped by the soldiers they cut them down, and pursue their way."

"What ! The citizens cut the soldiers down ?"

"Yes, sire. But there will be more soldiers out presently—they must be out ere this—and then the captain will strike."

"By the sacred sword of Mars !" cried the monarch, leaping up from his throne, "This thing shall be stopped, though every citizen in Syracuse do lose his head ! Hasten back to Claudian, and bid him spare no man ! He should have had the whole guard out ere this ! By the powers infernal, I should marvel much if ten thousand well-armed soldiers could not quell rebellion here ! Off with thee, and bid the captain not to spare a head !"

"Heleón," the monarch added, after the captain's messenger had gone, turning to one of the lieutenants who stood near him, "go to the court of the palace, and see that every gate is locked, and that the guards are at their posts. Bid the officer that he suffer not a person to pass under any pretext whatever."

The king then sank back upon his throne, and pressed his hands upon his brow. The distant din increased, and there seemed to come up from the streets of the city a muttering like that of a volcano.

“Does not the noise grow louder?” Pyrrho whispered to his chamberlain.

“It does, sire; but I have thought it might be our soldiers at their work.”

“Ha! So it may, good Donatus. Yes, yes, Claudian has surely set his hounds of war upon the game!”

But the monarch could not sit still. He started up and paced the floor with rapid strides, ever and anon stopping to listen to the increasing din. He turned to Hippon, his jailer, and bade him go and see how matters stood with the palace guard; and then he walked to and fro again. At length the roar of confusion became frightful, and loud sounds arose upon the air.

“That is not the noise of the guard!” the monarch said.

“It sounds too free and bold for them,” the chancellor returned.

“Ha! What sound is that? Hark! Who comes now?”

The great door was thrown violently open, as the king spoke, and the captain of the guard rushed in. He was covered with dust, and the blood was streaming down over his face from a wound upon the brow.

“Sire,” he gasped, struggling for breath, “all is lost.”

“Lost!” shrieked the monarch, seizing the captain by the arm. “Who has lost? What mean you?”

“The people have arisen and are armed!”

“But how could it be? How came such concert?”

“That ball of fire, your majesty, which startled us so, arose from the temple of Diana, and it must have been a signal which the people understood; for immediately they were on the move in every direction.”

“But—death and destruction! Are there no powers to overcome them? Speak, Claudian!—Where are your ten thousand soldiers?”

"Alas, sire, I know not," replied the captain, as if afraid to tell all he knew.

"Know not? Wert thou not ordered to arouse them every one? By the gods, thou knowest where they are. Now speak!"

"I did arouse them, sire—such as were not already aroused—but they had better have slept; for many of them not only refused to obey me, but ran off and joined the mob."

"The soldiers—joined the mob—turned traitors?" gasped Pyrrho, quivering at every joint.

"Aye, sire. It was from one of my own guard that I received this wound. I knew his intent, and would have arrested him, when he drew his sword and cut his way from the guard-house, and joined the people."

"Ha! here comes another messenger. How now, dog, bring you croakings of evil?"

"Sire," spoke the officer—a lieutenant who had just rushed in—"the populace are aroused and in arms, and several whole companies of the guards are with them!"

"But those shouts, sir lieutenant, what are they?"

"The people crying out for vengeance."

"And upon whom?"

"Hark!" at this moment interrupted Donatus, "can you not hear, sire?"

Aye, he could hear; for there arose upon the air a shout, loud and long, and its burden was:

"Death to the Tyrant!"

Ere the king could speak further, another messenger came rushing in, with his sword broken, and his left arm dropping blood.

"They are upon the palace, sire!" he cried; "and they sweep everything before them!"

"Who? who?" gasped Pyrrho.

"The mob—the people—the city!"

“But who leads them?”

“Agrippa, the priest of Abydos, and another old priest of Diana, seem the guiding spirits—”

“Curses upon that infernal priest!” hissed the king.

“But, sire,” pursued the messenger, “the one who seems their chief general, who cuts down all opposition with his trenchant blade, and by whom the people swear in their war-cry, is none other than the son of Orneus—Alaric!”

“Foul fiend, thou liest! ’Tis not Alaric! He is dead!”

“No, sire. I have seen him with my own eyes; and by his side stalks a huge giant, of dark aspect, whom they all call Alkanor; and together they cut down our guard as the husbandman cuts the ripened grain!”

“Now, by the throne of highest heaven!” exclaimed the monarch, clenching his hands and his teeth, “some foul demon hath broken loose upon our land! But they may not gain admission to the palace. The walls are strong, and the gates firm. Where is Hippon? He has not returned?”

Even while Pyrrho spoke, the jailer made his appearance. He was pale as death, and quaked from head to foot.

“How now, Hippon? In mercy’s name, look not upon me with such a gaze! What is it?”

“Thy guard, sire—”

“I know of my guard! Tell me of the palace!”

“Thy gates are all thrown open!”

“No! no! ’Tis false! They could not be opened so easily!”

“’Twas by traitors from within, sire!”

“Now may the Fates of Tartarus seize me! But—” gasped the king, clenching his jailer by the arm, “I’ll not believe it! It cannot be!”

"Hark, sire!" spoke Donatus. "They are already in the outer court."

"Aye," added Hippon, "they come! they come!"

"And," pursued the chamberlain, "hear their shouts! Dost hear, sire?"

"Yes," the monarch answered in a quick, hoarse whisper, and then bent his ear to listen.

"We must flee!" said Hippon, "for they will soon reach us here!"

"Hark!" said the king, in the same whispered breath, but more sharp and shrill this time. "Dost hear that cry, which is raised even in the very palace?"

"Yes," returned the chamberlain. "I hear them cry 'Long Live Alaric and Ianthe!'"

"And dost hear that voice in the vestibule?"

"Yes. 'Tis Alaric's. He is coming hither!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the king, a mad, wild, demoniac laugh. "I have the power still in my own hands! Ianthe is mine! mine! mine! No one else shall ever own her! She has held this rebellion in her destiny; and, if they gain the throne, they shall lose the queen! Ha, ha, ha! Thus will I have sweet vengeance and thus thwart them in half their traitorous designs! Donatus, Hippon, men of my household, slaves, save yourselves as best you can! I go to plant my sword in the very heart and germ of this rebellion."

Thus speaking, the monarch seized a torch from one of his slaves, and hurried from the throne-room. Along the dark passages he strode through corridors, around abrupt angles, and up broad, winding stairs with his drawn sword in his hand. He reached the firmly bolted door of the nuptial chamber, and having cast back the ponderous fastenings, he threw it open. Ianthe, pale and quivering, her hand clutched upon the brazen bars

stood by the window, listening to the strange sounds that came up from below, and she did not see the blood-thirsty tyrant as he approached her.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

“Now,” cried Pyrrho, as he came near to the spot where the maiden stood, “thou shalt be wedded to a monarch greater than I—to the King of Terrors !”

With a sharp, quick scream, like the note of a wounded bird, Ianthe started back from the window as she heard the king’s voice, and shrank away to the wall.

“Aha ! Thou hast been listening to the voices of the mob, eh ? Hast thou heard any which are familiar to thine ear ?”

What did the king mean ? Why did he look so strangely ; and why that naked sword in his hand ! She could not answer him.

“Hast heard Alaric’s voice ?” he continued with a hiss.

“Oh ! ’twas his voice, then !”

“Aye. And thou hast heard it for the last time ! Thou knowest all that I know, so there is no need of marvel between us. The people did love thy father when he was king, and now they would take a ruler who has thee for his queen ; but I’ll thwart them here. I know there is no escape for me ; but ere I fall into the hands of mine enemies, thou shalt be taken from them ! The prestige of thy name shall not be theirs ! No man who outlives me shall pluck roses from the lips of my

queen ! So go to the land of shadows while yet thy virgin purity is unsullied !”

“Sire !” at this moment spoke a deep voice behind him.

The king dropped the point of his sword and, upon turning, he beheld his chief eunuch. The powerful black seized him by the arm, and wrenched his weapon from him, and then stepped in before the maiden.

“Fool ! idiot !” gasped the monarch, stamping his foot with rage, “dost think I am crazy—that I have lost my senses ? Give me back my sword. I know what I am about.”

“Thou canst not have it, sire,” replied the eunuch, with perfect calmness.

“How !” cried Pyrrho, seeming utterly unable to credit the evidence of his own senses, “art thou not Mestor ?”

“I am.”

“And my slave ?”

“No, thy master, now.”

“Ha !” burst from the king’s lips, while his eyes darted forth a wild, maniac gleam. “And art thou, too, among the traitors ?”

“I will speak the truth, sire,” returned Mestor, still calm and unmoved. “Within these three hours my life has been at the mercy of those who are about to hurl thee from the throne, and they asked me if I loved thee. I told them I hated thee for thy tyranny, but that I obeyed thee because thou wert my master. Agrippa, the priest of Diana, then told me that I might follow thy fortunes, or accept a new service. When I knew how matters stood, I accepted the new service. I swore allegiance to Alaric and Ianthé, and am now at my post. I did this for two reasons : First to save own my life,

which I love very well ; and second because I hated thee, and would rather be free from thy tyranny."

The monarch was for some moments unable to speak. He tore away the linen from his bosom, as though his breath were choked thereby, and glared upon the eunuch wildly. But finally he seemed to comprehend it all ; and, as his energies struggled up from the shock, he uttered a loud cry of rage and madness, and sprang, like a beast of prey, upon the new-found conspirator, clutching his fingers upon his throat, and holding there with the grip of a tiger.

"By the power of Pluto," the frenzied monarch gnashed forth, "I'll have thy life, foul dog of a slave ! Thou shalt not breathe again !"

The powerful black struggled with all his might, but he could not break the madman's hold from his throat. He could not bear it—it was painful—the king's nails were eating into his flesh and ere long he must faint from exhaustion. He had little choice left, and he resorted to the first that suggested itself.

He would have spoken, and warned Pyrrho of his danger, but he could not articulate. In his agony he drew back his arm and plunged the sword, which he had just taken from its owner, though the body of his royal assailant. As the king felt the sharp steel pierce his side, he relaxed his grip, and Mestor then shook him off.

During this strange conflict there had been a louder shouting than before from without, and as the eunuch cast Pyrrho from him, the fall of many feet was heard in the adjacent corridor ; and presently a man clad, in steel and gold, rushed into the chamber. In his hand was a dripping sword, and his cuirass was stained with many a dark spot.

"Where—where is Ianthe ?" he cried,

The maiden darted up from the couch upon which she had fallen, for the rich notes of that voice rang with regenerating music in her soul.

"Alaric!" she replied, putting forth her hands, and gazing upon him with a joyful gratitude beaming in her beautiful features, "Here! here! Safe! oh, safe!"

And he wound his arms about her and gazed down into her loving eyes, and told her again and again that there was no more to fear.

But Alaric had not come alone. Behind followed he whom we have known as Agrippa, and another strange priest; and with them were Alkanor, the gigantic Egyptian, and two other stout craftsmen.

"Fiend and furies!" hissed the king, turning from Alaric and fastening his gaze upon the two priests. "Who art thou that thus holdest power over me? Who art thou? Man, god or demon—speak!" And he moved toward Agrippa, and gazed more eagerly into his face.

"Base tyrant—behold who am I!" and thus speaking the priest let the mystic mantle fall from his shoulders, and tore the flowing locks from his head and face.

"Death!" gasped the monarch, starting back aghast. "This is thy trick! It is not thy real shape!"

"You behold me as I am, thou quaking tyrant!"

"And art—Bellerus?"

"Aye."

"My father!" cried Ianthe, starting toward him.

"And behold me!" said the second priest, stepping forth while Bellerus was embracing the maiden, and throwing off his own disguise, thereby revealing the form and features of Artabanus, the old hermit of Catalano.

"Shades of the dead and doomed!" the monarch cried, putting out his hands before him as though he

would feel that it were flesh and blood which he saw, "this cannot be. My vault cannot have given up its inhabitants thus !"

"Fool !" returned Bellerus, stepping back from the king's cold touch, "did ye think when ye took me to that old vault that I knew not your plan and purpose? And did ye think that I voluntarily placed myself within your power without knowing how I could get out of it? Know that the craftsmen who built this palace knew every passage in it, and that there be craftsmen living at the present day who know more of it than you do. That vault beneath the great tower was originally built for a prison of death, and the founder had it so arranged that water could be let into it, filling it over half full. When I first examined the walls I discovered the pipes, and knew that it must connect with the conduit which supplied your bath. I and my companions removed one of the stones above the point where this pipe entered, and soon discovered that we could thus gain entrance to a narrow passage which led down to the chambers beneath the palace. Now the question arose : should we fix the vault as you desired? It was evident that you meant to use it as a safe and sure place within which to dispose of those whom you wished to be rid of, and that we should be the first victims. We resolved to do the work ; so we privately prepared the secret passage from the vault which was just above the line which the water could reach, and when the water was let on to that point, no one could be hurt by being thrown down into it. We concluded that this would be the safest way for us. As for myself, I knew that you meant that I should die, and if you once supposed me surely out of your way within that vault, I could disguise myself and still work on in the great cause we

had in hand. And more, too : I knew I should thus gain the power of saving the lives of those whom you would murder ; for, if you believed that the simple consigning of them to the vault would destroy them, you would put your most dangerous enemies there and I or my friends could be on hand to rescue them from the water.

“ So we fashioned it all to your liking, and to our own ; but we were prepared against violence ; and, after we had let the water in, we could at any moment have made our escape by leaping down into the dark abyss. We held several conversations, when we knew you were near by to hear us, giving to you the idea that we had other means of escape when our work should be done. You consigned us to the vault as we knew you would. We fell into the water and easily clambered out through the passage we had constructed. There were men in your own household who knew all your movements, who were only spies upon you ; and to them we communicated the secret, so that they might watch and rescue any person whom you should consign to the pit. Artabanus knew his fate and his opportunity to escape, ere you led him hither.

“ When I went forth from your palace, our chief priest, Pythion, had just received intelligence that Agrippa of Abydos, who had been expected to visit Syracuse, could not at present come ; so I assumed his character, and it has served me well. It has enabled me to keep my existence a profound secret from the world, and you left me free to work.

“ And, foul king, I have worked—we have all worked—to some purpose. A tyrant may never know whom he can trust. Many who serve him serve him with hatred, and cherish revenge while yet they bend the

obsequious knee. But thou turnest pale ! Thou bleedest ! Art wounded ?”

“ I die !” gasped the monarch, pressing his hand upon his side.

Bellerus and his companions had not noticed before that Pyrrho was wounded, as the blood had been hidden by his garments ; but they now saw a dark pool where he had stood, and also discovered that he was growing faint.

“ Oh ! Mestor !— slave !— dog !— fiend !” And as these words fell from the king’s lips, he staggered towards the eunuch, as though he would again grasp him by the throat ; but his eye was growing dim, his step was unsteady, and he reeled against the wall. Mestor caught him, as he was sinking to the floor, and conducted him to a couch, and then turned and explained to those present how the event had happened.

“ Well,” spoke Artabanus, “ ’tis better so. ’Twill save the executioner some trouble, and relieve the new ruler from the necessity of pronouncing the death-decree upon the man who has shed so much Sicilian blood during his wicked and cruel career.”

“ Who has shed blood ?” asked Pyrrho, starting up from his couch, and glaring wildly about.

“ Thou hast,” answered Alaric, advancing towards him. “ Aye, the best blood in all the kingdom thou didst shed when thou seized the throne !”

“ Ha, ha, ha ! And thou hast shed blood now.”

“ No, no,” quickly returned our hero, “ not of worthy men. I have stricken down some human heads to-night but they were upon the shoulders of thy hireling Carthaginians, who have no sympathy with our people, and would have slain my friends about me. I have not shed one drop of Sicilian blood, for there was no

need of it. Every true son of Sicily was ready to cry out 'Death to the tyrant !' "

"Death to thee !" yelled the monarch, clenching his hands, and endeavoring to reach the youth. But his step grew weak, the wild fire of his glaring eye went suddenly out, his arms fell powerless by his side, and with one deep, long gasp, he reeled to the floor.

The eunuch went out and knelt by his side, and lifted up his head.

"Bear him to his couch," said Artabanus.

"There is no need," replied Mestor, "he is dead !" And, as he spoke, he laid the head of the fallen monarch back upon the cold pavement, and rose to his feet.

The morning sun arose brightly upon Syracuse, and as the golden beams began to light up the city, the people left their dwellings and crowded towards the royal palace.

The story had been told during the night that the daughter of the royal Helixus had been found, and that the brave and noble son of Orneus had returned, and would be her husband. And it had been told, too, that good old Artabanus and honest Bellerus had protected the princess since her father's death, and that it had been long determined that Alaric should be her consort. And it had also been told how the tyrant had tried to murder Alaric and Bellerus, and Artabanus ; and how he had sought to crush the lovely princess. All this had been told, and the strange story had passed from tongue to tongue till all the people knew it.

And now, as the morning broke, another tale was wafted to the popular ear. The tyrant had fallen by the hand of one of his own slaves. 'Twas said, and said by those who knew, that the cruel king would have murdered the princess Ianthe, but for the timely interfer-

ence of his chief eunuch, and that this eunuch then killed him to save his own life.

It was a wondrous theme, and one fraught with hope and gladness to the people. They listened to the startling story, they told it over and over again, and then shouted for joy.

And the beams of the morning's sun penetrated to the royal palace, and illuminated its vast chambers and sumptuous halls. In the great throne-room, where two hundred pillars of porphyry supported the massive roof, assembled all the chief men of the city. And here, once more, the story was told. Artabanus himself told it now. He told how Helixus had died in his arms——

But stop. At the mention of that well-remembered name, the name so honored and revered, a gentle murmur arose from the vast concourse of people, which gradually swelled into a louder note of love and gratitude to the memory of the departed.

After this Artabanus told the story of the princess, and of Orneus, and when he had spoken, the young couple were led forth upon the dais in front of the throne, where amid murmurs of admiration that could not be hushed, they were solemnly married.

“And now,” cried Artabanus, holding aloft the crown of Sicily, “I do as your last true king bade me do, if his people would permit it, and I should deem it proper: I place this crown upon the head of him who has been thought worthy to be the husband of our well-beloved princess. Men of Sicily, behold your King and Queen!”

He stepped away from the throne as he spoke, and for a moment the people gazed upon the noble pair in silence. Awhile Ianthé returned their admiring gaze, and then, unable longer to bear the scene, she turned to her husband, and pillowing her head upon

his bosom, burst into tears. He wound his left arm fondly about her, and, when he had wiped the gathering moisture from his own eyes, he turned to the assembled multitude, who were all hushed to silence to hear what he would say.

“Men of Sicily,” he cried, “I ask your allegiance. Give it to me, and I will try to win your confidence and love by my own endeavors. And when I no longer hold the hearts of my people, let me lose my crown. You, who have served my predecessor so faithfully,—you, Donatus—you, Claudian—and you, Hippon—if you can forget these wounds, and be true to your country, shall find the past buried with its wrongs, and yourselves judged by what you shall henceforth prove to be.”

And then the palace shook to its very foundations with the shout that went up from the thousands of happy hearts, and all over the city the shout arose. “Alaric and Ianthe !” was the cry ; and from street to street, from valley to hill, from hill-top to mountain-side across the verdant plains, went the glad cry, and it did not stop in a day, in a year, but through long, long years it continued to go up from the lips of a people redeemed. In the crowded city and in the open country, in the shop of the artisan, and upon the field of the husbandman, wherever peace and thrift prevailed, thence arose blessings and honor upon the wise, good king, Alaric.

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